SERMONS

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

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TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A REVIEW of his GRACE's LIFE and CHARACTER.

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SERMON I.

PHIL. iv. 8.

Finally, Brethren, whatſoever Things are true, whatſoever Things are honeſt, whatſoever Things are juſt, whatſoever Things are pure, whatſoever Things are lovely, whatſoever Things are of good Report; if there be any Virtue, and if there be any Praiſe, think on theſe Things.

AS the excellent Characters of the firſt Believers and Teachers of Chriſtianity are in general a ſtrong Recommendation of it to Mankind: ſo that of St. *Paul* in particular ſhines with diſtinguiſhed Luſtre through his whole Hiſtory; but eſpecially his Epiſtles, the faithful Pictures of his Soul. Even in this ſhort one to the *Philippians*, it is ſurprizing to obſerve, how great a Variety of moſt exalted and engaging Virtues he ſhews. The Authority of the Apoſtle is ſo perfectly tempered with the Condeſcenſion of the Fellow-Chriſtian:

the Expreſſions of his Tenderneſs for thoſe to whom he writes are ſo indearing and inſtructive at the ſame Time: his Acknowledgments of their Kindneſſes to him, ſo equally full of Dignity, Humility and Diſintereſtedneſs: his Mention of his paſt Perſecutions is ſo mild; and of his preſent Danger, (for he wrote from a Priſon) ſo cheerful: his Attention to the ſupporting of their Courage is ſo affecting; and his Confidence, that both he and they ſhould perſevere and conquer, is ſo noble, and yet ſo modeſt: his Deliberation, whether Life or Death be eligible, is ſo calm; and his Preference to live, even in Miſery, for their Sakes and that of the Goſpel, is ſo genuinely heroic, yet fully equalled by the compoſed and triumphant Mention, which he elſewhere makes, of his approaching Martyrdom: his Zeal for propagating Religion is ſo ardent, yet attended with ſo deep a Concern, that it be indeed true Religion: he is ſo earneſt to guard them, both againſt a ſuperſtitious Reliance on outward Obſervances, and a licentious Abuſe of the Doctrines of Faith and Grace; ſo ſolicitous to improve them in rational Piety, and meek beneficent Virtue; ſo intent to fix their Minds on every thing worthy and amiable, and raiſe

them above every thing gloomy or anxious; his Warmth in this glorious Cause, is so far from being affected or forced; and every Expression so evidently flows from a Heart, which cannot help overflowing, that, whoever shall read but this one Epistle with Attention and Fairness, under all the Disadvantages of a Translation made Word for Word, and broken into short Verses, will feel a strong Impression on his Mind, that the Writer of it must have been an uncommonly great and good Man; every Way deserving of the high Rank, which he claims, of a commissioned Servant of God, and incapable of claiming it falsely.

But, besidos being thus moved with the admirable Spirit expressed, and the sublime Precepts diffused, throughout the whole; it will be still a new Subject of Esteem and Wonder; to see the Force and Substance of them all collected at last into one brief Exhortation; comprehending in so narrow a Space, the intire Compass of virtuous Dispositions, and right Behaviour, as is done in the Text: to which he subjoins with conscious Boldness, appealing to all which *they had learned and received, and heard and seen of him*[a], that this had been his own Disposition and Behaviour: yet

[a] Phil. iv. 9.

humbly considers himself as *not having already attained or being already perfect*, but merely as *pressing towards the Mark of the Prize of the high Calling of God*[b]; and not only uses his own *Prayers*, but begs *theirs* also, that, *through the Supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*, all things may *turn to his Salvation*[c]. We cannot help honouring such a Character: but, if we hope to be the better for it, we must also imitate it. And therefore let us examine with this View, that Description of it which I have read to you. Had the several Phrases, used in it, been as nearly as possible equivalent, and accumulated only to convey the intended Meaning more fully and strongly, this would have been warranted by the Example of the great *Roman* Orator: who professes to have done the same Thing on a like Occasion[d]. But there is a superior Accuracy and Beauty in the Words of the Apostle. Each of them singly hath a distinct Sense: and

[b] Phil. iii. 13, 14. [c] Phil. i. 19, 20.

[d] Nihil enim habet praestantius [natura], nihil quod magis expetat, quam honestatem, quam laudem, quam dignitatem, quam decus. Hisce ego pluribus, nominibus unam rem declarari volo: sed utor, ut quam maxime significem, pluribus. Cic. Tusc. Disp. l. ii. c. 20.

See also A. Gell. l. xiii. c. 24. where several Instances of this Manner of speaking are given, and Reasons for it alledged; and Cic. De N. D. l. ii. § 7. and De Fin. l. iii. c. 4.

joined together they form a connected and complete Body of Duty, as will appear by examining them separately: which I shall therefore do in the first Place; and then, Secondly, make a general Observation upon the Whole.

Truth, always present to the Mind of God, is the Ground of his Commands; and, so far as discerned by us, is the Ground of our Obedience. On this accordingly the Apostle here builds, and lays for the Foundation of his whole Superstructure, *Whatsoever Things are true*: that is, conformable to the clear Perceptions of our Understandings, the inward Feelings of our Hearts, the known Circumstances of our Situation. Setting out thus, he excludes, in the first Word, from being any Part of Christian Duty, every thing romantic and visionary, all Refinements of false Honour, all Enthusiasm of a heated Fancy. But he enjoins at the same Time, whatever is reasonable and right; be the Practice or Notions of the World as contrary to it, as they will: whatever the sovereign Principle of Conscience dictates, though Passions and Appetites may draw powerfully another Way; whatever the impartial State of any Case requires, let Vanity or Interest make ever so much against it: what we owe to our Maker, no less than what is due to our

Fellow-creatures: what divine Revelation teaches, no leſs than what human Faculties diſcover: what the future as well as the preſent Condition of our Being demands. For our Relations to God are as real, and infinitely more important, than to Man; thoſe Parts of his Will which only Scripture makes known, the Authority of Scripture being proved, are intitled to equal Attention with thoſe which Reaſon dictates of itſelf: and ſuch Conſequences of our Actions, as will follow beyond the Grave, are but a ſingle and a ſhort Step more diſtant, than the viſible and daily ones that follow them here. Theſe Maxims are the ſolid Baſis of proper Conduct: the whole Creation cannot ſhake them; and every other Scheme of Life is built upon the Sand, and will cruſh us under its Ruins. God himſelf proceeds invariably according to the Reaſon of Things; he muſt therefore expect Man to hold it ſacred; and both the Honour of his Government and the Holineſs of his Nature ſtand engaged, that, ſooner or later, every one ſhall find his Account in obſerving this Rule, but none in tranſgreſſing it. For *his Righteouſneſs is an everlaſting Righteouſneſs, and his Law is the Truth*[e].

[e] Pſalm cxix. 142.

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The ſecond Head of the Apoſtle's Injunction is, *Whatſoever Things are honeſt:* or rather, as the marginal Tranſlation hath it, *venerable*, intitled to Reſpect: for ſo the original Word in the Greek confeſſedly ſignifies, as indeed the Word *honeſt* itſelf doth in the Latin Tongue, from whence it is derived into ours.

If, purſuant to the former Direction, we conſider, according to Truth, the inward Frame of our Hearts and Minds, we ſhall perceive, that, as Man was created at firſt in the Image of God, ſo there ſtill remains in our Nature, however defaced by the Fall, a Senſe of Dignity and Worth, which we ought to reverence in ourſelves and others. The loweſt of Men, with Reaſon, think Falſehood and Diſhoneſty beneath them; and the higheſt, if they condeſcend to uſe them, loſe, by ſo doing, a much truer Greatneſs than they retain. Worldly Advantages leave the Poſſeſſors of them but juſt the ſame Men, which they would have been without them. Perſonal Accompliſhments as often produce wrong Conduct, Hatred, Contempt and Miſery, as they do the contrary. At beſt, neither the one nor the other can give more, than a ſhort-lived, and precarious Diſtinction. But Scorn of Wickedneſs, and Eſteem of our Duty, ſhewn in Prac-

tice, this is the valuable Pre-eminence, which will continue an Ornament to us through every Condition of Life, through every Period of our Existence; will intitle us to inward Veneration, as well as outward Regard, and recommend us, not only to fallible Beings, but to the unerring Searcher of our Hearts, and final Rewarder of our Deeds. Whoever therefore would obtain a truly honourable Character, must preserve himself above dishonourable Actions: and never permit either Profit, or Pleasure, or Favour, or Power, titular Pre-eminences, or popular Opinion, to debase him into doing any Thing ill.

Keeping up this Kind of Superiority to the Height carries no Pride in it, no Temptation to Pride. For, though a worthy-minded Man knows every Thing to be mean, in Comparison of right Behaviour; yet he must know too, that his own Behaviour is very imperfectly right, even in the Sight of Men, much more of God: and were it completely so, it would still amount to no more than his bounden Duty. He will therefore always proceed with great Humility, though with great Steadiness, in the Discharge of his Conscience; patiently expecting, what he will certainly find, that many other Things,

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and ſome of them very bad ones, will greatly out-ſhine, in the Eyes of the World, ſo plain and unpliant a Qualification, as this, of uniform Uprightneſs: which yet is indeed beyond all others the reſpectable one: the only Ground of conſcious Self-approbation, of mutual Eſteem, and Truſt, of public Order and Safety.

For, however common it is become to treat all Pretence of Principle, as mere Hypocriſy; and both to give with great Gaiety, and receive with great Complacency, Intimations, which one ſhould think could do neither Side much Credit, as if Intereſt or Inclination would induce them, or any one, to do almoſt any Thing; yet ſuch general Repreſentations are both falſe in themſelves, and pernicious to human Society. The worſt of Men are not thoroughly bad, without ſome Mixture of good. But nothing can go farther towards making all Men ſo, than treating it as an acknowledged Point, that they are ſo already, and cannot be otherwiſe. In Proportion as this Doctrine prevails, no Guilt will be out of Countenance. Now what the Conſequences of that muſt be, is eaſily diſcerned; and the Prophet hath told us very plainly: *Were they aſhamed, when they had committed Abomination? nay, they were not at all aſhamed,*

ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall—At the Time that I visit them, they shall be cast down, saith the Lord[f]. Undoubtedly the Wickedness of Mankind is great: and those in high Stations have particular Opportunities of seeing it in a strong Light. But still, they, who feel any good Qualities in themselves, cannot justly think, there are none in others. And be there ever so little Probity in the World, it is our most serious Interest, to cultivate and increase it. For what Comfort, or what Safety, can there be in the midst only of the Profligate and Abandoned? Or how shall either Authority or Merit support itself, if that inward Reverence of Duty and Worth be worn out of the Minds of Men, without which all the Solemnities of external Forms will soon come to lose their Influence? But if earthly Tranquillity could be preserved by other Means: yet heavenly Happiness can be enjoyed only by Souls exalted to a Capacity of it; purged from every Thing mean and base, and, by generous and honourable Dispositions, *made meet to be Partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light*[g].

The third Branch of the Apostle's Exhortation, *Whatsoever Things are just*, is naturally con-

[f] Jer. vi. 15. [g] Col. i. 12.

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nected with the ſecond. Had we nothing ſuperior in our Nature to reſtrain us, Force and Fraud would be as allowable between Man and Man, as between Brute and Brute. But the Conſciouſneſs which we have of peculiar Dignity, includes the Obligation to mutual Juſtice, as Part of itſelf, and yet there was Need to mention this Part ſeparately; becauſe elſe, the higher the Notion which each entertained of his own Value, the more apt he might be to overlook others, eſpecially his Inferiors, and trample upon them careleſſly. Therefore St. *Paul*, in the Text, immediately ſubjects the mutual Behaviour of all the Sons of Men to one common Meaſure; and requires, that the higheſt and the loweſt ſhould each treat the other, as each might expect, were Circumſtances changed, the other ſhould treat him; which ſingle Precept obſerved would keep the World in Quiet: and if it be tranſgreſſed, nothing is left to ſtop at, ſhort of univerſal Confuſion. Every one therefore, in every Part of ſocial Life, ſhould be vigilant againſt the Influence of Pride, and Paſſion, and Intereſt: ſhould inquire with Diligence, and hear with Candour, in order to judge with Impartiality: ſhould remember, that nothing is truly Juſtice, but what is Equity

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at the ſame Time: ſhould do frankly and immediately what he knows he ought to do: and ſo temper his Prudence with Innocence, as always to prefer Harmleſſneſs to worldly Wiſdom, whenever they interſere. That others will act very differently, is ſo much the worſe for them: but no Conſideration for us to be moved by, in the leaſt. The whole we have to be concerned for, is to act right ourſelves. A wiſe and good God will take Care of the reſt.

Next to Juſtice, the Apoſtle ranks, in the fourth Place, a Virtue equally flowing from the Dignity of human Nature, and ſeldom violated without grievous Injuſtice, that of ſhunning the Pollution of criminal Pleaſures, and practiſing *whatſoever Things are pure*. Some Kinds of ſenſual Exceſs, as Gluttony and Drunkenneſs, are acknowledged to be contemptible, hateful Vices. And however favourably too many look on the free Indulgence of another Appetite, at leaſt in one Sex, yet their Opinion cannot alter the Nature of Things. Irregular Gratifications muſt ſtill remain what they are, diſhonourable to our Reaſon, deſtructive to our Happineſs. And it is ſurprizing, that they, who have any Rightneſs of Mind, can fail either to diſcern or to reflect, what Meanneſs

neſs it is to make theſe Things the Buſineſs of their Being; and aſſociate, ſor the Sake of them, with the profligate and abandoned: what Imprudence, to ruin or to hazard their Healths, Fortunes, or Reputations, in ſuch wretched Courſes; and what Miſchief, to deſtroy the Virtue and Peace of the Innocent, and harden the Guilty in their Crimes; to violate Faith and Honour, diſtreſs Families, embitter the neareſt and tendereſt Relations of Life, confound Deſcents and Inheritances, extend Infamy, and perhaps Diſeaſes alſo, to ſucceſſive Generations. Indeed the Sins of this Kind have not always all theſe bad Effects: but they undeniably produce in general, by innumerable Ways, more thorough Wickedneſs, and more exquiſite Miſery, than almoſt any others. And even thoſe Tranſgreſſions of Purity, that may ſeem the leaſt hurtful, are ſo wrong in themſelves, and ſo contrary to the good Order, Strength, and Welfare of Society; they lead on ſo naturally to worſe; they ſet ſo dangerous an Example, and give ſo plauſible an Excuſe to others, for going a little and a little farther in the ſame Way, (as indeed there is no poſſible Ground to make a ſure Stand upon, if once we depart from ſtrict Virtue); that whoever conſiders,

ſiders, will be far from thinking, either the Precepts, or the Threatenings of Scripture, on this Head, too rigid and ſevere.

But abſtaining from diſhonourable, and injurious, and criminally ſenſual, Actions, is by no Means ſufficient, unleſs we are careful to do becoming, beneficent, and engaging ones; or, in the Apoſtle's Words, *whatſoever Things are lovely:* Which claſs of Duties he hath put in the fifth Place with great Propriety. For the Good-nature and Agreeableneſs, required under this Head, is not to ſupply the Room of the Juſtice and Purity required before; nor can poſſibly make Amends for the Want of them; but we muſt firſt reſolve to be innocent, then ſtudy to be amiable. Now the two great Branches of amiable Conduct are thoſe, on which the Goſpel hath laid ſo peculiar a Streſs; Mildneſs in bearing Injuries, and Bounty in relieving Neceſſities: one of them expreſſly made the Condition of our being forgiven; the other the Foundation of our being rewarded.

But, beſides theſe endearing Virtues, the Apoſtle undoubtedly deſigned to enjoin every other Act of a generous and diſintereſted, a candid and ſympathizing, Heart; every Inſtance of Gentleneſs to the Faults, and Condeſcenſion

ſcenſion to the Weakneſſes, of Men; Moderation and Humility in advantageous Circumſtances, and patient Compoſedneſs in low and afflicted ones; every ornamental, as well as more ſubſtantial, Duty of Life; Affability of Converſation, obliging Attentions, kind Compliances; whatever will make our common Journey through the World mutually comfortable and pleaſing, without making it dangerous; and exhibit Religion in its native Cheerfulneſs, as a reaſonable Service paid to an infinitely good Being. For all theſe Things are comprehended under the Character of *lovely*; and conſtitute a much more valuable Part of Chriſtian Practice, than many ſeem to be aware of. Indeed Piety and Virtue, however unpoliſhed, deſerve high Eſteem; and it would be a moſt unhappy Miſtake, to prefer ſuperficial Accompliſhments before intrinſic Worth. But ſtill, both Religion and Morals, diſguiſed under a forbidding Look, appear ſo much leſs to Advantage, than when they wear an inviting one; that we wrong our Profeſſion, as well as ourſelves, if we neglect to ſhew it in as much Beauty, as a modeſt Simplicity will permit; and thus to *adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all Things*[h].

[h] Tit. ii. 10.

Nor is it enough to practise what we think right and worthy and becoming, but we ought further to respect, in a proper Degree, what the rest of Mankind esteem so. And therefore the Apostle adds in the sixth Place, *Whatsoever Things are of good Report:* and places this Head after the others; because, if a Competition arises, Conscience is always to be preferred before common Opinion. And indeed numberless are the poor Wretches, who have been utterly ruined, by sacrificing at once their Virtue and common Sense to reigning Sins and Follies. Not that, in general, the public Voice is nearly so favourable to wrong Conduct, as some are willing to imagine. All, who are not guilty of it, we may be sure will disapprove it. Many who are, condemn it, even in themselves. Nay, such as encourage others in it, often censure them for it severely notwithstanding. Or, was every bad Man true to his own bad Cause, yet both their Weight, and even their Number, is less considerable, than they would have it thought. The gay and the loud, the bold and the forward, nay the great and the noble, however they fill the Eye, are by no Means the whole of the World: but there is Reason on many Accounts to look beyond these: and in-

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quire, what the ſerious and conſiderate, what the Generality and Bulk of Mankind, whom it is neither modeſt nor prudent to deſpiſe, will think of our Conduct; what hath been the Judgment of Time paſt on the like Behaviour; what is likely to be the Judgment of Time to come; when we ſhall be ſpoken of without Ceremony, and have the Characters that we appear to deſerve, indelibly fixed on us: a Matter about which we can not really be indifferent, though we may affect it.

Nor ought the Opinion of Mankind only to aſſiſt in deterring us from what we know to be Wrong; but reſtrain us from many Things, that we poſſibly imagine very allowable. We may apprehend, perhaps, that ſuch and ſuch Liberties have no Harm in them. But if others, worthy of Regard, apprehend they have; may not we be miſtaken as eaſily as they? And is not the ſafer Side the better? or were we ſure that we judge right, is there no Deference owing, in Point of Decency, to the contrary Judgment? Eſpecially if it be the general, the eſtabliſhed one? Beſides, may we not endanger Duties of great Importance, by deſtroying wantonly even the ſlighter Outworks that defend them? May not our tranſgreſſing what is

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commonly eſteemed ſacred, lead ſome to eſteem Nothing ſacred; and others to ſuſpect, that we eſteem Nothing ſo? Now this latter Effect alone, or any Thing that approaches towards it, would ſurely be very undeſirable. And they, who have no Concern what they are thought to be, are in Danger of having but little Concern what they do.

The Apoſtle, having thus recommended every Thing that we can diſcover to be a Law of Life, and every Thing accounted ſuch by the Wiſe and Good, may ſeem now to have gone the utmoſt Length that Precept could go. But he had ſtill one Thing in Reſerve for the ſeventh and laſt Place, to complete and crown the whole. Beſides the conſtant Obligations of all Men, expreſſed hitherto; ſome, indeed moſt, on one occaſion or another, are qualified for Actions of diſtinguiſhed Excellence, tranſcending the common Meaſures of Duty. And though none ſhould aim at what is beyond his Strength, and all ſhould firſt ground themſelves throughly in Things neceſſary, before they aſpire farther; and ever beware of doing the leaſt Evil, to bring about the greateſt Good: yet, theſe Precautions being obſerved, *If there be any Virtue, and if there be any Praiſe*; any

singular Opportunity for exerting superior Goodness, and acquiring proportionable Honour; to this also the Word of God, far from discountenancing an Ambition so laudable, excites and encourages in the Text. Here then every one is called forth, by the Voice of Heaven, to every Thing great and good, that shall at any Time lie in his Power: to serve his Creator, and benefit his Fellow-creatures, the most eminently that he can, by all the Means, that his Knowledge and Wealth, his Example and Persuasion, his Influence and Authority, can furnish out. And *blessed is that Servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing*[1].

These then are the *Things*, *on* which the Apostle directs us to *think*: and the general Observation which I would make upon them, in the second Place, is, that we cannot think of them in earnest, as enjoined by our Religion, without honouring it highly, and being strongly moved by it to every Part of right Temper and right Conduct. Such Precepts evidently prove, that Christianity is not a Contrivance to make Men, by Faith in Speculations, and Exactness in observances, happy in another World, without being good in the present. Articles of

[1] Matth. xxiv. 46. Luke xii. 43.

Belief, and Institutions of Worship, are Instruments only: proper indeed, and appointed ones: and we must never hope to be amended or accepted, unless we take the Way to be so, which God hath marked out. But neither must we hope, that a formal Use of the Means will be sufficient, without serious Care to attain the End. *Now the End of the Commandment is Charity*, Love to God and Man, *out of a pure Heart, and of a good Conscience, and of Faith unfeigned*[k]; which Words express the very same Temper with those in the Text.

If then these be the Things, which Mankind have Need to learn, and God expects; it should be remembered, that they are taught in Perfection by the Scripture Revelation, and the Methods of acquiring them too: that neither the one, nor the other, were ever taught, without Revelation, either generally, or statedly, or without gross Defects and Errors: and that they, who reject this Way of Instruction and Worship, have not pretended to substitute any other; but shewn, by neglecting the Commands, and transgressing the Restraints, of natural Religion, that their Disregard to Christianity proceeds from bad Motives; and will produce,

k 1 Tim. i. 5.

in Proportion as it increases and spreads, the very worst Effects. Whoever, therefore, is indeed concerned for true Virtue and moral Piety, will affectionately esteem those incomparable Lessons of each, which the Gospel affords him: and whoever hath at all a due Sense, how very often he hath violated, on one Occasion or another, the Dictates of both, will rejoice from his Heart in those Assurances and Means of Forgiveness for what is past, and Assistance in what is to come, with which nothing but the Gospel can bless him. For, however thoughtless Offenders may flatter themselves, every considerate Mind must see and feel, that Sin deserves Punishment, and Repentance is not Innocence; that Pardon and Grace are not Debts, but voluntary Favours; and God alone can inform his Creatures with Certainty, on what Terms he will bestow them, and to what Degree. Now he hath accordingly informed us, that only *Faith* in Christ, *working by Love, availeth any Thing*[1], and that shall intitle us to every Thing.

But then Faith is not mere Belief; nor is Love mere Admiration, of the Advantages and Promises of the Gospel: but being moved by

[1] Gal. v. 6.

these to an uniform Practice of its Laws is the single Evidence which proves their Genuineness: and unhappily is the very Attainment of which the Generality of Men fall short. Some there are, who retain the Name of Christians, and seem to think it their Due, though perhaps they scarce remember the Time, when they performed any one Act of Christian Devotion, at least in private. On public Worship, it may be, or some Part of it, they do attend sometimes, to save Appearances, or in Hope of Entertainment, or from a confused Notion of its being, they scarce know why, a Duty: but without the least Conception, almost, of any further Difference, between having Religion, and having none. Others, that make a Conscience, such as it is, of Part of what they are commanded, have no Regard at all to the rest: but they will be pious without Virtue, or virtuous without Piety; or they will chuse, just as they fancy, which of the Laws of either they will obey, which they will not. Even the more truly good seldom think of aspiring to Eminence of Goodness: and they, who in many Respects attain high Perfection, often fail, most unhappily, of adding the Beauty of Holiness to the Reality

of it, by an amiable and obliging Deportment and Conversation. Thus it comes to paſs, that ſome deſpiſe Religion, as uſeleſs; and others are diſguſted with it, as harſh and diſagreeable: that not a few of its Profeſſors will find it contribute only to their heavier Condemnation; and many of thoſe who are intitled to Reward will obtain a much inferior Reward to what they might have done; and all owing to the Neglect of thinking, as they ought, on the important Virtues recommended in the Text. We give much Attention to low and tranſitory Things; too much, it may be feared, to ſinful and forbidden ones. We muſt know theſe excellent Qualifications to be the worthieſt Objects of our Thoughts: why ſhould they not alſo be the moſt conſtantly preſent to them? But ſuppoſe they were, it is of no more Uſe to think with ſpeculative Delight on the Precepts, than the Privileges of the Goſpel: but we muſt ſo conſider both them and ourſelves, as diligently to examine, and faithfully bring to Account (for this the Word *thinking on* ſtrictly denotes in the Original) our Duty and our Practice under each Article; and compute the Goodneſs of our Condition, not by the Share that we poſſeſs,

 either

either of the gay, or the solemn Trifles, to which alone Men commonly attend; but solely by the Result of this momentous Inquiry, made with great Impartiality, and with earnest Prayer for the divine Illumination. Nor will thinking on our spiritual State, merely enough to know it, benefit us; without thinking effectually how to mend and improve it: by imploring God's Pardon for every Thing wrong, and ascribing to his Grace every Thing right in us; and asking and using his future Assistance, to withstand all Temptation, and increase in all Goodness. *These Things, therefore, think on and do: and the God of Peace shall be with you*[m].

[m] Phil. iv. 9.

SERMON II.

JOSHUA xxiv. 15.

And if it ſeem evil unto you to ſerve the Lord, chuſe you this Day whom you will ſerve: whether the Gods which your Fathers ſerved, that were on the other Side of the Flood; or the Gods of the Amorites, in whoſe Land ye dwell: but as for me and my Houſe, we will ſerve the Lord.

THE Sovereign Diſpoſer of all Things, being reſolved to deſtroy the Inhabitants of the Land of *Canaan* for their impious and barbarous Idolatries and unnatural Luſts, was pleaſed to make the *Jews*, who were a much better, though far from a blameleſs, People, the Inſtruments of their Deſtruction, in order to warn them the more ſtrongly againſt the like Sins. Their Leader in this awful Work was *Joſhua*: who after he had accompliſhed it, divided his Conqueſts amongſt them; and then, having received, from the Gratitude of the People,

People, an Inheritance in his own Tribe[a], no Way confiderable, which however was all that he afked; appears to have retired thither, and fpent the reft of his Days in an honourable Privacy; leaving the Adminiftration of Affairs, in Time of Peace, to the ordinary civil Magiftrates; till, finding his End approach, he *gathered all Ifrael, and called for their Elders, their Heads, their Judges and their Officers*[b]; and they prefented themfelves before God. In this folemn Affembly, the laft he was to fee, requefting nothing for himfelf or his Pofterity, but ftrictly following the Example of *Mofes*, who had in no Refpect exalted his own Defcendants above the reft of the People; he expreffes the ftrongeft Solicitude for what he knew the public Happinefs to depend on; the Prefervation of true Religion, and confequently of Virtue, in Oppofition to the fuperftitious Follies, and fhocking Vices, of the Nations round them. To promote this End, the venerable Chief recounts to them, by the efpecial Direction of Heaven, the miraculous and gracious Difpenfations of Providence, which their Fathers and they had experienced, and he had been fo long a conftant Eye-witnefs of; concluding the Hiftory with their prefent

[a] Jofh. xix. 49, 50. [b] Chap. xxiv. 1.

happy

happy Condition: and his Inference from the Whole is, *Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him, in Sincerity and in Truth*[c]. But being sensible that Mankind are strangely apt not to think themselves in a good State, when they are in the best; he proceeds to intreat them, that if any are dissatisfied with the Fruits of observing their present Religion and Laws, they would consider well, under what other, upon the Whole, they would wish to be; for under some they must. They might, if they pleased, after all he had said, try a Change, and take the Consequences: but he had seen too much of the Benefit of adhering to God, to have the least Desire of experiencing what would be the Effects of forsaking him; and his Prayer and his Endeavour should be, that all under his Influence might tread, for ever, in the same Steps. *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you, this Day, whom you will serve:—but as for me and my House, we will serve the Lord.*

In these Words we have,

I. An Intimation of the Danger there is, that Men may grow weary of true Religion.

[c] Josh. xxiv. 14.

II. An

II. An Admonition, that ſuch would think ſeriouſly what they propoſe to exchange it for; and what Advantage they expect from thence.

III. The Reſolution which prudent Men will make, whatever others do; to continue in the Practice of it themſelves; and preſerve a conſcientious Regard to it amongſt all that are placed under their Inſpection.

I. An Intimation of the Danger there is, that a great Part of the World may grow weary of Religion, even whilſt it is taught in Simplicity and Truth.

Undoubtedly one of the ſtrongeſt Prejudices againſt it hath ariſen from the abſurd, and often hurtful Mixtures, with which, from Time to Time, it hath been corrupted, either by miſtaken or deſigning Men. Theſe have tempted many to reject the whole, good and bad promiſcuouſly; without ſeparating what was of God from what was of Man. Now, were every Thing elſe to be treated in this Manner, not one of the righteſt Principles of Behaviour, or the moſt valuable Bleſſings of Life, could poſſibly eſcape. For what is there on Earth, that hath not been frequently miſunderſtood, perverted

and

and abuſed, both by Weakneſs and Wickedneſs? It is therefore the groſſeſt Partiality, not to diſtinguiſh in the Caſe of Religion, when we do it in every other: indeed, not to be as zealous for every real Part of it, (for they are all highly uſeful) as againſt the Corruptions it hath unhappily undergone. And yet, even in a Country where it is the pureſt, ſome can allow themſelves to talk, as if it were Fraud and Impoſition throughout: can gratify their Vanity, defend their Vices, or ſerve their Intereſts, by inſiſting confidently on the moſt groundleſs and exploded Objections; ſometimes againſt all Reverence to Him who created them; often againſt the Revelation he hath made to them: nay, can ſlight it as intirely, without being acquainted with the Shadow of an Objection, as if they had the ſtrongeſt in the World: think it a Reaſon abundantly ſufficient, that they ſee others of good Figure do ſo; and at laſt, perhaps, ſet themſelves to make it their Scorn, without having once conſidered in earneſt, whether they ought not to have made it the Rule and Comfort of their Lives.

This is going great Lengths; yet not abſolutely the greateſt of all. For it hath happened too commonly, that thoſe very Things, for

which

which Religion ought to be honoured moſt, have been the true Cauſes of Mens oppoſing and forſaking it. The *Jews*, for Inſtance, were diſguſted with theirs, becauſe it was too ſpiritual and refined for them. We, indeed, who are bleſſed with one yet more ſo, may be tempted to find the contrary Fault with that of *Moſes*. But think what the Worſhip of the World was at that Time: Worſhip of the Sun, Moon and Stars; brute Beaſts, Stocks and Stones; Altars under every green Tree, and upon every high Hill; Ceremonies numberleſs, unmeaning, immodeſt, inhuman. How prodigious a Reformation was it then, to introduce, inſtead of theſe miſchievous Abſurdities, the Adoration of one only inviſible Being, the Maker of all Things! and the Offering of Sacrifices to him in one only Temple upon Earth; with Rites and Obſervances, few in Compariſon, and directly pointed againſt Idolatry and Superſtition! But what was really the Merit of their Religion, was the Ground of their Clamour againſt it: *Make us Gods to go before us*[d]; let us have Deities, that we can ſee and feel, to carry along with us; was the Cry of the People: and whenever they forſook the Lord, it was for theſe more

[d] Exod. xxxii. 1, 23.

ſubſtantial

ſubſtantial Objects of Devotion. This may ſeem unaccountable enough; and yet, amongſt ourſelves, Converts are frequently made to a Communion, one of whoſe chief Recommendations muſt be, that it ſtrikes the Senſes, with Images and Formalities, Pomp and Shew.

But, as ſome are prejudiced againſt true Religion for being too rational; many, it may be feared, are averſe to it for being too moral. As long as Piety can be made, in any Shape, conſiſtent with Sin; whether by truſting in Faith without Works, or ſubſtituting Works of no Value for thoſe of real Value; or abounding in ſome one Sort of Duties, inſtead of honeſtly practiſing every Sort; ſo long it may be borne with. But if the Teachers of it will aſſert and prove, and attempt to convince Mankind, that no one can be pious, without being uniformly virtuous; then there remains no Poſſibility of compromiſing Matters: but, if Religion will give no Quarter to Vice, the Vicious muſt give no Quarter to Religion: a very bad Inducement, I own, but a very ſtrong one; and it deſerves careful Reflection, whether a principal Reaſon, why Chriſtianity is now, more than ever, diſregarded, be not

this;

this; that now, more than ever, ſince the primitive Ages, it is ſo preached, as to leave no Room for being godly and wicked at once. But, however this be, there appears, in general, but too much Danger, indeed but too much Experience, that Men may be tired even of true Religion; that it may *ſeem evil unto them, to ſerve the Lord their God.* Therefore the Text contains,

II. An Admonition, that ſuch, as are diſpoſed to throw off the Bonds of Duty to their Maker, would think ſeriouſly, what Sort of Change they are about to venture upon, and how they hope to be Gainers by it.

No other Courſe, that they can take, ſo much as promiſes any Good with reſpect to a future State: yet they muſt own there may be one: nay, if God be either juſt, or wiſe, or good, or true, there will; and if there be, it is the moſt important Intereſt we have, or can have, to be happy in it: yet nothing but Religion, provides againſt our being miſerable in it. A Conſideration, which takes little Time to expreſs; but very few ſpend enough in thinking of it: for what are the poor Pleaſures of this ſhort Life, compared with the Joys or the Pains of Eternity? But even

even as to the prefent World, how much Freedom foever bad Men may affect, fome Mafter they muft ferve; fome Reftraints they muft be under, and fome Mortifications they muft go through. Confider the Purfuits of the felfifh and ambitious; are not they obliged to fupprefs their Inclinations, and contradict their Paffions, in a thoufand Inftances, to carry the fingle Point of their worldly Advantage? Confider the Indulgences of the voluptuous and intemperate, the Sallies and Flights of the wild and extravagant; we are apt to fay indeed, that they deny themfelves Nothing: but is it true? Are there not Multitudes of Things, that all of them wifh for, and cannot have: and ftill greater Multitudes, in Proportion as they give their Wifhes a larger Scope? Is any poffible Scheme of Life to be carried on, without Self-denial in fome Thing or other? Or, if Men can, and will, do juft as they pleafe at firft; what comes of it? Is it not the perpetual Confequence, that they muft fuffer for it at laft; and bear much the heavier Burthen, after a Time, becaufe they fet out with the Refolution of bearing none?

If therefore every Method, we can pitch on, hath at leaft, either its Reftraints, or its Sufferings; and probably both: which are moft

reasonable? which are most beneficial? Those of Religion and Morals; or those of the various Masters, which, on departing from Religion and Morals, we must obey? It concerns us highly, in such a Question, not to flatter ourselves, and take Things for granted; not to guess, and run the Risque, but to examine and choose: whereas the Misfortune is, Men enter upon a Course, and follow it their whole Lives, without ever deliberately chusing it at all: *halting*, as the Prophet expresses it, *between two Opinions*[d], whilst they proceed in one Tenor of Practice; and that, the wrong one. For the unsafe one is certainly the wrong: and, unless Religion cannot be true, neither Impiety, nor Immorality, can be secure. Whoever therefore allows himself in either, ought before-hand to know very certainly, what is impossible to know (for we cannot know Things to be true, which are false); first, that Nothing remains to be hoped or feared in another Life: and then, that Wickedness bids fairest for Happiness in this.

Too many indeed appear to think the latter Point, at least, a very clear one. But remember, the Inquiry is, not merely, what will

[d] 1 Kings, xviii. 21.

afford

afford us moſt Pleaſure juſt at the preſent; or even for a few Years; though it is ſeldom, that the vicious find Reaſon to applaud their own Conduct ſo long: but what will continue to pleaſe, what will give us the Advantage upon the whole, taking inward Satisfaction into the Account, as well as outward Gratifications; and not only delight us in the firſt and ſmalleſt Part of the Journey of Life, but ſupport us in the Remainder, that needs it moſt; and enable us to conclude it with Comfort and Credit. That abandoned Wickedneſs cannot do this, every one, who thinks and obſerves, muſt ſee; and they who do not, will ſoon feel. Some therefore contrive to take a middle Way: indulge themſelves beyond Virtue, yet reſtrain themſelves ſhort of Profligateneſs. And undoubtedly there would be leſs Guilt in this, if it were not, that being ſo deliberately guilty is a great Aggravation. There may alſo fewer worldly Inconveniences follow from it: but ſtill, if great Deviations from Duty lead to great Miſchiefs; the ſmaller muſt, in Proportion, lead to ſome. And beſides, they, who intended to go but a little out of the Way, are almoſt always either invited, or driven gradually farther and farther: and can never know before-hand, where they ſhall

 ſtop.

ſtop. Indeed what is there to ſtop them? Deſires multiply and ſtrengthen. Duty is out of the Queſtion. Prudence grows accuſtomed to ſubmit: perhaps falls low enough, to adviſe covering one Sin with another. What now ſhall keep ſuch Perſons back from any Crime? A Principle of Honour, it may poſſibly be ſaid. And true Honour, ſo far as it goes, is a noble Principle indeed. It is uniform Virtue, adorned with Dignity of Manners, with Attention to every Thing praiſeworthy and amiable, and Scorn of every Thing baſe and mean; judging what is ſo, by Reaſon and Truth, not vulgar Opinion. But the falſe Honour of the vicious is an aïry Phantom, changeable as Fancy and Faſhion vary, that permits in Multitudes of Inſtances, and requires in ſome, the wickedeſt, the cruelleſt, the abſurdeſt Behaviour; and ſets Men up for Objects of Reſpect, that have no one good Quality, merely becauſe they profeſs calling to Account whoever ſhall fail of the Regard they demand, or aſcribe to them any bad Quality, which they do not care to own. It can never be, that ſo wretched a Counterfeit as this ſhould be the Guide of Life. There is therefore none to be truſted to, if Virtue be rejected; and Virtue, without Religion, neither is complete,

plete, nor will be effectual. If other Superiors and Benefactors are intitled to Reverence, God is. If outward Expressions of Reverence are to be shewn them, they are to be shewn Him: both to preserve it alive in our own Minds, and to spread it around us. And if any Expressions of it are due, those which he hath appointed are due. Paying such Regard to God, joined with Attendance on proper Instruction, must naturally produce a serious Care, to abstain from every Thing injurious, to do every Thing beneficial, in human Life: as not only our indispensable Obligation, but our most important Interest. And what other Motive can either extend so far, or influence so strongly? If then there be any Need, that the World should grow better, or not grow worse; that Men should live together innocently and usefully; have Comfort under Afflictions in this Life, or look for eternal Blessedness in the next; Principles of Piety must be encouraged. Nay, could we possibly be content to give up all these Advantages, there would still remain other Considerations of great Weight on the same Side. Though we may throw off Religion so far as not to be governed by its Precepts: we shall be made, on that very Account, from Time to Time, extremely uneasy

by its Threatenings: and the Consequence of not obeying God as Children, will be dreading him as Criminals. What if here and there a few profess to have got over these Fears? Perhaps inwardly they know the contrary; or, however, they come to know it when they least think of it; or, could they be sure never more to experience them on Earth, they will too soon feel surer and greater Torments in Hell, for having thus wickedly hardened their Hearts. But Mankind in general cannot get over the Fear of God. Some Religion they must and will have: and the only Question is, whether it shall be a good and true, or a false and bad one. *Joshua* therefore puts the Matter to the *Jews* in a perfectly just Light: *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you whom you will serve: whether the Gods which your Fathers served that were on the other Side of the Flood; or the Gods of the Amorites, in whose Land ye dwell.* It is true the *Israelites* were prone to Superstition: we are inclined to Profaneness; and therefore may seem in no Danger of the opposite Extreme. But universal Profaneness, and total Unbelief, never subsisted long any where, and never will: the World could not bear it: and the human

Mind

Mind hath a natural Bent the other Way. You have ſeen this in the Caſe of the *Jews*. What was that of the Gentiles when they forſook the Truth? That *becauſe, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful*; they *became vain in their Imaginations, and their fooliſh Heart was darkened*, till they *changed the Glory of the incorruptible God into an Image made like unto corruptible Man, and Birds, and four-footed Beaſts, and creeping Things* [c].

We of the preſent Age indeed cannot well go thus far at once: but by how eaſy Steps may we come to it! Were not our Forefathers near it, but a little more than Two Hundred Years ago: worſhipping, with more Zeal than they did their Maker, Images of pretended Saints, many of whom had lived and died great Sinners, and addreſſing Prayers to them in a Language they did not underſtand? Now the ſame high Road, that of Popery, is open yet. And will not Numbers be inclined to take it, if they can be perſuaded, from what they ſee, that the Profeſſion of the Proteſtant Religion is the direct Way to the Profeſſion of no Religion at all? When public Worſhip and Inſtruction are once deſerted, or attended on with viſible Indifference and Contempt;

[c] Rom. i. 21—24.

 when

when Perſons are taught Nothing, and guarded againſt Nothing; will they not of Courſe be in Danger of every Thing? And have we not Seducers among us in every Corner, trained up with the moſt artful Subtlety, to work on the Ignorance of ſome, the Guilt of others, the private Intereſt of a third Sort; to lead them over unto a Communion, that hath corrupted the Notions of Piety, and weakened the Bonds of moral Obligation; done infinite Miſchief to Mankind by Tyranny, Perfidy and Cruelty; and muſt be an eternal Foe, whatever it may ſometimes pretend, to that happy Eſtabliſhment of Truth and Liberty, which may God preſerve to us and ours? Whoever therefore hath a Dread of Superſtition, Bigotry and Slavery, ſhould be zealous in the higheſt Degree for pure Religion, and if ever he would have his Zeal effectual, muſt expreſs it in the ſame Manner, that we find in the

IIId Part of the Text, the Jewiſh Chief did; by reſolving, that, *whatever others do, he and his Houſe will ſerve the Lord.*

Fear of Singularity hath a moſt powerful Influence on Mankind: and, in Matters nearly indifferent, it is very uſeful that it ſhould. But in Points of Importance; our Concern is, to act as we ought ourſelves, let thoſe

around

around us act as they will: take all the innocent Care we can, neither to provoke their Anger nor Contempt; but still do the right Thing, and stand by it: preferring the Testimony of our own Hearts, that we deserve Approbation, before receiving from Men ever so much of it. But especially in Religion, both Reason and Scripture dictate this Behaviour. And yet many, who can even affect to be singular in Trifles and Follies, have such a cowardly Fear of being thought so in the Case of seriously professing Religion, where it would be truly honourable, and they would in Fact be honoured for it, perhaps even by their present Acquaintance, or at least by better whom they might chuse, and by the World in general; that, to avoid this imagined Evil, they will incur the most real ones, a guilty Conscience in this World, and the Wrath of their Maker in the next. If this be not contemptible Weakness, what is? And if it be, serving the Lord, let ever so few do it, is true Wisdom.

But then it must be observed, that, though every Degree of genuine Regard to God will produce to us proportionable Benefits, and preserve us in some Degree from Sufferings; yet

yet the Life and Immortality, promifed in the Gofpel, can be attained, and, where it is faithfully preached, eternal Punifhments can be avoided, only by Obedience to the Terms propofed in the Gofpel. The Doctrines, therefore, which God hath revealed there, plain or myfterious, muft be received with humble Faith; the Duties he hath enjoined there, moral or pofitive, muft be obferved with pious Reverence; and our Hope of future Happinefs muft be placed, not in the Merit, either of our own good Works, for without the Grace of the Holy Spirit we cannot do any; or of our own Repentance, for being forry that we have finned is not being innocent; but folely in the Divine Mercy through our bleffed Redeemer, who died for us that we might live to Him. And, how much foever thefe Rules may be overlooked or defpifed in the World, yet he hath repeatedly affured us, with uncommon Strength of Expreffion, that our *not being afhamed of him and his Words*, of which thefe are Part, is an indifpenfable Condition of his not being *afhamed of us at the great Day*[f].

But ferving the Lord, as good Chriftians ourfelves, is not fufficient, when we are in-

[f] Mark viii. 38.

trufted

trusted with others also. Now, in some Degree, we are intrusted with all who are placed under our Influence, especially if they be under our Authority too: and God, with Justice, expects every one to do the Good, which he hath given him Abilities for doing: for, conferring them, is the highest Honour he can bestow on his Creatures; and using them, is the noblest Way of at once obeying and resembling our Creator. But, not to exceed the Limits of domestic Life, to which the Text points our View: Parents are, by Nature and Scripture, intrusted with their Children: bound in Conscience to endeavour, that the Being, which they have given them, prove not a miserable one: bound in Prudence to provide, that, when they grow up, they may be a Comfort and a Credit to them, not a Shame and a Curse. And yet, how commonly is the ornamental and superficial Part of their Education the only one attended to? Perhaps a slight Form of catechetical Instruction, and a Prayer or two are learnt by Rote, as a Task in their Childhood, fore mere Form's Sake, and perhaps not: but, after that, very little Care taken in teaching them Rules of common Prudence; less still in giving them any consistent Principles

ciples of Morals; none at all in binding them down to both, by a ſerious inward Senſe of Religion; of the Purity of God's Law; their Depravity, and Need of a Redeemer and Sanctifier; the Importance of Chriſt's Ordinances, without which, nothing will be inwardly, or often outwardly, ſuch as it ought: and then, at laſt, either great Surprize and Anger is expreſſed, at their coming out, what it muſt be expected they ſhould: or elſe their Ruin is ſtupidly acquieſced in, as unavoidable from the Beginning: and Men ſit down contented, that they who are neareſt, and ought to be deareſt to them, ſhall be wicked, and wretched, and deſpicable; or, however they eſcape here, undone to Eternity.

But, not only our Children ſhould be led to eſteem and practiſe the Obligations of Piety, but our Servants and Dependants. We cannot indeed force them to it, and we need not. But we can give them Opportunity, and Advice, and Encouragement: we can remove the obſtinately bad, to preſerve the reſt: we can put the Inſtruction of good Books in their Way: we can call them to Family-Devotions, from the lamentable Omiſſion of which Duty, a very great Part of our Sins and Follies proceeds;

ceeds; and we can likewise bring some of them at one Time, and send the rest at another, to the House of God. It is very true, praying and reading at Home, and going to Church, are neither the Whole nor the Main of their Duty; and they will be faithfully told so, when they come here. But these are Parts of the first and great Commandment, Regard to Him that made us; and they are such Parts as, if they neglect, they will too easily think they may as well neglect the rest. Most of them would be glad of this kind Attention to them; all of them would respect us for it: and, were ever so many of them indifferent about it, or worse, ought it to be an Affair indifferent to us? When poor, ignorant, thoughtless Creatures come to live under our Roof; is it Christian, is it human, to let them go on, just as they will, to their own Destruction of Body and Soul? They contribute a great deal to our Happiness: why should not we contribute, since we so easily may, in this important Point, to theirs? But indeed is not our own, present as well as future, deeply concerned in it too? Our Ease, our Characters, our Fortunes, our Lives, depend on the Honesty, the Veracity, the Sobriety, the Diligence,

of thoſe about us. And what can ſecure theſe Qualities in them ſo well, as their being perſuaded, that God requires them at their Hands; and will treat them, as they treat us? Were this Motive weaker than it is, no real one ought to be deſpiſed. Loud Complaints of the ill Behaviour of the lower Part of the World, are made continually; but whom have the upper Part to thank for it but themſelves, if they take no Care to prevent or mend it? With the beſt Care, it will happen too frequently; but, without it, what elſe can happen?

Upon the Whole, it is aſtoniſhing, that any, who pretend to be good, can fail to endeavour, that their Children and Servants may be religious; when not a few, confeſſedly bad, take ſuch Precautions as they can to make them better than they are willing to be themſelves. And undoubtedly this is very prudent, ſo far as it goes. But, as the Prudence of ſuch People is throughout eſſentially defective, ſo this Inſtance of it, ordinarily ſpeaking, can go but a very little Way. For what Likelihood is there, that a few right Exhortations, or Directions, from the Head of a Family, will make the Members of it modeſt and ſober,

juſt and regular; while his Example authorizes them to be lewd and intemperate, unjuſt and diſorderly? Or that ſending them to Church will teach them to reverence God; whilſt, perhaps, the Table-talk that they hear daily, teaches them to deſpiſe him? Our Conduct therefore muſt be all of a Piece; elſe we ſhall neither ſucceed, nor will it avail us to our own eternal Happineſs, if we do. But let us firſt reſolve to ſerve God ourſelves; and then we may inſiſt, that they who belong to us ſhall, both with a good Grace, and good Hope of his Bleſſing: to which we cannot acquire a ſtronger Title, than by that Method, which procured, as we read in Scripture, to the Father of the Faithful and his Deſcendants, a Benediction ſo diſtinguiſhed, both temporal and ſpiritual: *Abraham ſhall ſurely become a great and mighty Nation, and all the Nations of the Earth ſhall be bleſſed in him. For I know him, that he will command his Children and his Houſhold after him, and they ſhall keep the Way of the Lord, to do Juſtice and Judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that, which he hath ſpoken of him*[g].

[g] Gen. xviii. 18, 19.

SERMON III.

MATT. xxii. 37, 38.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind.
This is the first and great Commandment.

THESE Words contain the former Part of our blessed Lord's Answer to the Question, *Master, which is the great Commandment in the Law?* It was put to him by one of the Scribes or Lawyers, the authorized Instructors of the People, *tempting him:* that is, designing to make Trial of his Knowledge, and the Soundness of his Doctrine. For the Man's Intention plainly appears to have been no worse than this, from his immediate Approbation of our Saviour's Judgement; and the gracious Assurance he received in Return, that *he was not far from the Kingdom of God*, as we read in the parallel Place of St. *Mark*[a].

[a] Mark xii. 34.

Which of the Commandments is the greateſt, may ſeem to us a Queſtion of more Curioſity than Importance: becauſe undoubtedly the leaſt, as well as the greateſt, ought to be obſerved. Yet ſtill it was a Point of ſome Conſequence in itſelf: ſince two Precepts might interfere: and Men be obliged to omit one in order to obey the other: now in ſuch Caſes it was material to know, which they ſhould prefer. But the Notions entertained amongſt the *Jews* increaſed the Neceſſity of a right Deciſion of this Doubt[b]. They divided the Injunctions of the Law, as appears from their Books yet remaining, into weighty and light ones. The former, they held, a Man muſt keep ſtrictly, *if he would enter into Life*[c] eternal: but the latter, ſome of them affirmed, had only a ſmall Recompence belonging to them, and that in this World; ſo that a Man might neglect them, one Rabbi ſaith *trample upon them*, without much Danger. Nay, there were Teachers of conſiderable Reputation amongſt them, who aſſerted, that God had given his People ſo great a Number of Precepts with this View, that, by obſerving any one, meaning probably any of the weighty

[b] Vid Schoetgenii Hor. Heb. & Talm. in loc. [c] Matth. xix. 17.

ones,

ones, they might obtain Salvation[d]. This was very bad: but their Opinions, which were the weighty ones, made it worse yet. Some insisted that those alone were weighty, the Transgressors of which, it was expressly threatened in the Law, should be cut off; and all the rest light. Some held the third Commandment, some the fifth, some the Observation of the Sabbath, some that of Circumcision, to be the weightiest. In our Saviour's Time, it seems by the Reply which the Scribe made him, that Sacrificing was commonly thought the principal Article of the Law. And indeed many Passages, not only in the Gospels, but in the Prophets, evidently shew, that the Nation in general were fond of exalting the ceremonial Precepts above the moral ones, because they found them less disagreeable. In themselves, it must be owned, the former were a heavy Yoke, though in their Circumstances it had long been a needful one. But to bad Men Nothing is so heavy, as reforming their Hearts and Lives. It is true, their Sacrifices, and all their Observances, rightly interpreted, required this, in order to their final Acceptance with God. But the outward Act being a Matter of great Form and Punctuality, and sometimes

[d] Pocock on Hos. xiv. 2. cites this from Ikkarim, l. iii. c. 29.

Expence too, they eafily perfuaded themfelves of what they had a great Mind to believe, that a fcrupulous Performance of fuch troublefome and fhewifh Duties would certainly be fufficient, whatever their inward Difpofitions and common Behaviour might be. Yet, at the fame Time, the *Effenes*, no inconfiderable Sect amongft them, though affecting Privacy, and probably therefore not appearing in the Hiftory of the Gofpels, ran into the contrary Extreme: and, profeffing great Sanctity of Manners, omitted the Temple-Sacrifices intirely[e].

In fuch a State of Things as this, it was natural to afk the Sentiments of fo remarkable a Teacher as our bleffed Lord: and very important, both for the Inftruction of the People and for his own Character, that he fhould declare them. Undoubtedly he had now a fair Opportunity of fecuring the Applaufe of the Multitude and their Leaders, by an Anfwer fuitable to the Notions in Vogue; inftead of gaining, as he did, by contradicting them, only the fingle Approbation of one good Man. But *for this Caufe came he into the World, that he fhould bear Witnefs unto the Truth*[f]: which

[e] Philo, Liber quifquis virtuti ftudet, vol. ii. p. 457. ed. Mang. Jofeph. Ant. l. xviii. c. 1. [f] John xviii. 37.

yet

yet he did with ſuch Prudence, as never to prejudice the leaſt Part of it in his Zeal for the greateſt. When he blamed the Scribes and Phariſees for preferring the minuteſt of ritual Obſervances to the *weightier Matters of the Law, Judgement, Mercy and Faith,* he added immediately, *Theſe ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone*[g]. In the Text he proceeds with the ſame Caution: and, well knowing how prone Men are to draw falſe Conſequences from the trueſt Doctrines, not content with deciding *which was the firſt and great Commandment,* he aſſures them, that the ſecond, a very comprehenſive one, was of the ſame Nature and Obligation with it: nay, for yet fuller Security, ſubjoins a Declaration, that, though to theſe were ſubordinate, yet with theſe were connected, whatever Things elſe the Scripture had required. *Jeſus ſaid unto him, Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind. This is the firſt and great Commandment*[h]. *And the ſecond is like unto it, Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf. On theſe two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.* Here then we ſee the whole Syſtem of

Matth. xxiii. 23.

[h] Azen Ezra ſaith, the Love of God is, שרש כל המצוות the Root of all the Commandments. Buxt. Floril. p. 278.

our Duty, ſtanding on its proper Foundation, and exhibited to our View in its natural Order: beginning with the Love of God, proceeding to the Love of our Fellow-creatures, and perfected in a careful Attention to every Regard of every Kind owing to either; which we cannot pay, without a virtuous Government of ourſelves.

The Love of God is the Subject to be explained at preſent: which I ſhall do by ſhewing.

I. Its Nature.

II. The Importance of it in Point of Duty.

III. Its Influence on our Happineſs.

IV. The Methods which infinite Wiſdom hath employed, to cultivate it in our Minds.

I. Its Nature.

Various Affections cannot fail to ariſe in our Hearts from contemplating the Attributes and Actions of our Maker. His Eternity and Preſence every where muſt needs raiſe in us Wonder and Aſtoniſhment. His unbounded Power and Knowledge, beſides increaſing this greatly, muſt alſo fill us with Apprehenſions, that our Happineſs or Miſery depends on his Conduct towards us. But there is no determinate Ground in all this for being either pleaſed or ſorry If then we conſider next, that the ſame being is perfectly juſt and righte-

ous

ous, this immediately gives us abſolute Security, ſo far as we are innocent; and great Comfort, that he, who can do all Things, will do only what is equitable. It gives us Fear indeed, with Reaſon, in Caſes where we are conſcious, as in Multitudes we all are, of ill Deſert. But ſuch Dread, even in the guiltieſt of Men, muſt be accompanied with a real, though unwilling, Approbation of the Character: and the penitent Concern of better Minds will be attended with reverent Eſteem. Yet, were we to ſtop here, our Veneration for God would be incomplete, becauſe there ſtill remains a more valuable and engaging Quality than any that we have hitherto been aſcribing to him. But let us advance one Step further, and place before our Eyes the univerſal Bounty and Mercy of our heavenly Father, proved by the plaineſt Reaſon, experienced in the Works of his Creation and the Courſe of his Providence; but exerciſed moſt fully beyond Compariſon in the unſpeakable Bleſſing of our Redemption, and revealed to us moſt plainly in the Declarations of his Holy Word: t[illegible] if our Souls have any Feeling, there will [illegible], up in them, lively Sentiments of Compla[illegible], of Gratitude, of Love. And when once [illegible]

neſs hath made the Impreſſion, every other Perfection of his Nature will both ſtrengthen it inexpreſſibly, by enabling him to do us continually all poſſible Acts of Kindneſs, and at the ſame Time regulate it duly, by a proper Temperature of that awful Reſpect, with which our tendereſt Affections towards *the High and Holy one, that inhabiteth Eternity*[i], ought ever to be intimately mixed.

Such then is the Love of God. And as our Senſe of the Divine Excellence cannot be too ſtrong, but muſt indeed at the beſt fall infinitely ſhort of what he deſerves; we are commanded to love him *with all our Heart, with all our Soul, and with all our Mind*; that is, with the utmoſt Exertion of our inward Powers. Not that we are to confine our whole Affection to him: for it follows, *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf.* Whatever hath any Thing amiable in any Degree, we ought, as far as we can, to eſteem in Proportion: and conſequently Him beyond Expreſſion moſt, who hath in the higheſt Degree poſſible every Thing that can appear amiable to our rational Faculties, duly exerciſed. All Objects therefore are to be excluded, ſo far as Attachments to them would be

[i] Iſai. lvii. 15.

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inconſiſtent with Devotedneſs to our Maker. Now the Worſhip of falſe Deities is peculiarly inconſiſtent with it. And for that Reaſon the Love of God, when preſcribed to the *Jews* in the Old Teſtament, is uſually explained by adhering to him with conjugal Fidelity, (for under that Image it is often expreſſed) in Oppoſition to his Rivals, the Idols of the Nations; and not dividing themſelves, as they were extremely apt to do, between *Jehovah* and them. But if, inſtead of theſe Idols, we *ſet up* any others *in our Hearts*[k]; make unlawful Pleaſure, Power, Profit, Reſentment, our Deities; this alſo is an evident Breach of the Faith which we have vowed to our ſovereign gracious Lord. Nay, if we value the moſt allowable Objects of Deſire ſo highly, as to forget or think little of the Supreme God, we ſtill incur the ſame Kind of Guilt. For we ought to conſider whatever we have Cauſe to love beſt, as beſtowed on us by his Hand; and therefore as a Motive to love him above all, *from whom every good and perfect Gift cometh down*[l]. To ſay indeed, that we ought to love it in this View only, as coming from him, would be going too far: becauſe, had we been ignorant of God, moſt

[k] Ezek. xiv. 3. [l] James i. 17.

Things,

Things, that deſerve our Liking now, would in their Degree have deſerved it then. But ſtill, the more we attend to the Goodneſs of God in every Thing, without neglecting the inferior Attentions to which he hath bound us, the nearer we approach towards being what we ought.

And further, the more affectionate this Regard to him on all Occaſions is, the better it will ſuit, not only the Words of the Commandment, but the Dictates of Reaſon itſelf: which clearly teaches, that the warmeſt Piety is due to the Author of all our Enjoyments. But then it muſt be obſerved, however, that Love to a Being intirely ſpiritual cannot, ordinarily ſpeaking, raiſe in us thoſe Perceptions of animal Fervour, which earthly Paſſions can: nor ought we to eſteem ourſelves upon them, if we had them. For Experience proves, that very bad Men may feel at Times high Raptures of this Kind; and very good Men may ſcarce ever feel any Thing of them: ſo much do they depend on Conſtitution. Far therefore from affecting ſuch Emotions, when we really have them not; which is a Sort of Hypocriſy, whether ſhewn before Men, or in the Preſence of God alone; we ought not to be too earneſt in

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our Wiſhes for them. If he gives them, we are to be thankful: if he with-holds them, it is either for our needful Correction, or, perhaps, our true inward Improvement. And by labouring to work ourſelves up to them, nay, by merely indulging them when our natural Frame inclines us powerfully towards them, we may be quite bewildered and loſt in unmeaning or injudicious Tranſports, little or nothing akin to that ſublime Duty, of which they would put on the Appearance. But ſtill leſs ought it to be confounded, as it often hath been, with a blind, or what is worſe yet, a bitter Vehemence of religious Zeal. For the moſt ardent Devotion, ſo far as it either produces Injuſtice or Indifference to our Brethren, or proceeds from unworthy Conceptions of God, is indeed by no Means the Love of Him, but of a Phantom of our own Imagination, placed in his Stead. And the real and only Teſt of the Genuineneſs and Strength of this divine Affection in our Breaſts, is the unvaried Conſtancy of a ſincere and reverent Delight in the Father and Lord of all, as the perfecteſt, and beſt, and moſt beneficent of beings; expreſſed in humble and hearty Praiſe and Thankſgiving, in a ſtudious Imitation of him, and a chearful Obedience to him.

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The next Thing to be laid before you is,

II. The Importance of cherishing and acting from this Principle, in Point of Duty.

Most People seem to think, that what they are pleased to call moral Behaviour, though perhaps in some Points grossly immoral, is their whole Duty. Others, who have some Notion of Piety, carry it little further than attending public Worship, more or less frequently, perhaps with very little Thought of what they are about. Some, who make a Conscience of private Prayer also, it may be doubted, neither feel, nor endeavour to feel, much of the good Things they say in it. Or, whatever Sense a few may have of the Fear of God, they have usually none almost of Love to him. Any real Experience of that Affection, they have heard so often treated, even by professedly serious Christians, as mere Enthusiasm, that they are apprehensive of Danger from it. The Scripture doth indeed enjoin it: and so they will bear with the Mention of it in Discourses from the Pulpit, provided it be passed over slightly, or interpreted away to just Nothing: else they conceive it to be at best intirely Supererogation; and leave it accordingly with all their Hearts to such as chuse to have more Religion than they need.

And

And, it muſt be confeſſed, this Way of Thinking hath received too much Countenance from the indiſcreet and extravagant Manner in which the Subject hath been ſometimes handled. But ſurely, explained as you have heard it now, there can be Nothing more reaſonable, or of greater Moment. If we have any Principle of Goodneſs in ourſelves, that muſt lead us to eſteem and love it in others. Now in God is perfect Goodneſs: and therefore not to eſteem and love Him, is to be void of right Affection towards that Being who deſerves it infinitely the moſt. Our Duty conſiſts in ſuch Behaviour as the Relations of Things require of us. To whom then are our firſt and moſt important Relations? Are they not evidently to our Maker, Preſerver, and gracious Benefactor, to our ſovereign Lord, and final Judge? Other Claims, however like in their Nature, muſt be unſpeakably inferior in their Degree to His. What Sort of Morality then is that, which dwells only on the tranſitory Obligations of Men one to another, and overlooks the eternal Bonds, which tie us, *ſo long as we have our Being*[m], to Him, *of whom, and through whom, and to whom, are all Things*[n]? The Regards that we owe him, indeed, are nu-

[m] Pſ. civ. 33. [n] Rom. xi. 36.

merous; and vary in ſome Meaſure as our ſpiritual State doth. But ſtill, as Goodneſs, though combined with other Attributes, was in the Beginning the active Principle in the Mind of God, and ever prevails through all his Diſpenſations: ſo is Love, though occaſionally aſſociated with other Movements of Soul, the original and univerſal Affection, due to him from all his rational Creatures: or, in our Saviour's Words, *the firſt and great Commandment.*

Suppoſe, in the mutual Intercourſes of this World, any one ſhould value, as he ought, a Perſon of but low Deſert; and yet be inſenſible to much higher Merit, well known to him, in another; ſhould be duly grateful to the former for Favours, not worth naming in Compariſon with thoſe which the latter had done him, and yet ſhould leave him and all his Kindneſs out of his Thoughts: would not ſuch a Turn of Mind be very wrong and criminal? Would not ſuch an excellent and beneficent Perſon be very unequally and unjuſtly treated? Yet this is exactly the common Behaviour of Mankind. Here we live amongſt poor imperfect Creatures, like ourſelves. We receive a few ſmall Benefits from ſome of them, and ſee a little Glimmering of Goodneſs in others; and ſhould be very blameable, if we

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did not feel and exprefs a proper Efteem for them, on Account of both. Now there is at the fame Time, not only within our Knowledge, but ever moft intimately prefent with us, a Being of inconceivable Perfection and Lovelinefs; from whofe Bounty we and this whole Univerfe have received our very Exiftence, and every Capacity of Enjoyment that belongs to it; by whofe continual Support we are upheld in Life; whofe Grace excites us to every Thing good; whofe Forbearance paffes over our daily Tranfgreffions; nay, *who hath commended his Love towards us, in that, while we were yet Sinners, Chrift*, his only Son, *died for us, that, being juftified by his Blood, we might be faved from Wrath*[o], *and rejoice in Hope of the Glory of God*[p]. What then have we Caufe to think of ourfelves, if we love not Him, who himfelf *is Love*[q]; if fuch Acts of Kindnefs make none or faint Impreffions on our Hearts; if we reflect but feldom upon them, and are influenced but little by them? Is there, or can there be, an Inftance of Ingratitude from Man to Man, that bears the leaft Proportion to the Unworthinefs of fuch a Temper? For that God hath no Need of our Acknowledgments, as our Fellow-creatures often have, only

[o] Rom. v. 8, 9. [p] Ver. 2. [q] 1 John iv. 8.

proves his Goodneſs to be the greater; and therefore ought not ſurely to make our Senſe of it the leſs. Now, if theſe Things are thus evident to our View, in how much ſtronger a Light muſt they appear to his all-ſeeing Eye? And with what Diſlike and Indignation muſt he look on ſo ſhocking a Depravity, as that of refuſing him the very Affection, which he purpoſely and principally formed us to exerciſe towards himſelf, its moſt deſerving, its only adequate Object? For, as all that in a moral Senſe is good in his whole Creation, is but the Shadow of Divine Perfection; ſo the Eſteem and Love of what is good muſt ever be eſſentially defective, till it leads us to, and terminates in, the Love of Him.

But let us now conſider alſo the Effects of this Principle on other Parts of our Duty. We muſt ſet our Hearts on ſomething. Worldly Things are all of them Trifles. Many of them are not to be attained, but by unlawful Means: however attained, Fondneſs for them debaſes and corrupts us. We ſee and feel it every Day: all the Wickedneſs that prevails on Earth ſprings from it. Therefore, to avoid this Danger, Men have been directed to fix their Attention on the Rightneſs, the Amiableneſs of Vir-

tue:

tue: and right and amiable it is, no Queſtion. But, without having Recourſe to unhappy Experience, the plaineſt Reaſon ſhews, how weakly and how tranſiently the bare Idea, the abſtract Notion of moral Excellence muſt affect ſuch Creatures, ſurrounded with ſuch Temptations as we are, compared with an affectionate Regard to Him, in whom the Fulneſs of it dwells, and overflows on all the Works of his Hands. Every Sort, indeed, of Regard to God, is a more powerful Incitement to Virtue, than any other Motive: but Love hath a peculiar Force; often in beginning a Change from Evil to Good, but always in carrying it on, and compleating it. While we obey only from Fear of him, we are unwilling and backward, imagine Difficulties, contrive Excuſes; and think it a Point gained, if we can perſuade ourſelves, that this or that needs not be done. If Hope be added to it, without any Inducement more generous, we ſhall ſtill be in Danger of aiming to get our Reward by doing as little for it as we can. But thoſe, whom we love, we ſerve with Alacrity and Zeal; forget our own Inclinations to adopt theirs, hate every Thing that diſpleaſes them, deſpiſe every Thing that doth not recommend us to them, look on their Com-

mands as Favours and Honours, rejoice to encounter Difficulties for their Sakes, and think we can never do enough to teſtify our Attachment to them. What noble Improvements then muſt Love to God make in the Performance of our Duty; and how can it fail,

III. Of increaſing our Happineſs, even in this World, as well as the next!

For Want of cultivating this delightful Affection, the Thoughts of him are dreadful to the Generality of Men. Too many are tempted to wiſh in their Hearts, if they durſt, that he were not, or had no Regard to human Conduct: and if any of them can but perſuade themſelves for a while, on the Strength of ſome poor Cavil, to hope what they wiſh, they triumph in the imagined Diſcovery, that ſets them ſo much at Eaſe. From the ſame Default, humbler and righter Minds conſider him very often in no better Light, than as a rigid Lawgiver, arbitrarily exacting a Number of almoſt impracticable Duties, and inforcing them with the Dread of inſupportable Puniſhments: whence they are ready to ſink under the Terrors of Religion, even while they are conſcientiouſly fulfilling its Precepts. Looking on God as the Object of Love would rectify theſe miſtaken Conceptions intirely. We

should all see and feel, that a Being of infinite Goodness, directed by infinite Wisdom, is the highest Blessing; and the Want of such a one would be the greatest Calamity, that is possible: we should be satisfied, that the strictest of his Laws, and the severest of their Sanctions, are Means which he knows to be needful for our Good; that his Mercy will forgive on Repentance our past Transgressions of them, that his Grace will strengthen us to keep them better, and that he will never reject a Soul affectionately devoted to him. In Proportion then as we are so, all terrifying Apprehensions will vanish from us. *There is no Fear in Love*, saith St. *John*; *Fear hath Torment*; *but perfect Love casteth out Fear*[r].

Another Sort of Men there is, who have not much Uneasiness, but little or no Pleasure in Religion. What they call performing their Devotions, is commonly nothing more than going heavily through a few customary Shews of Respect, and repeating by Rote a certain Number of good Words, without any Life, or almost any Meaning. No Wonder, if the Benefit of such Worship seems to be so small, that more than a few, whose Consciences would not suffer them to neglect it,

[r] 1 John iv. 18.

cannot however help considering it as a burthensome Task, enjoined them, they scarce know why. But were these Forms and Shadows turned into Substance, by the real Exercise of that devout Affection which is professed in them, we should none of us any longer think hardly or meanly of the highest and happiest Employment of the human Soul. We should be filled with pleasing Reverence in doing Homage to the gracious Lord of all, celebrate his Perfections as interested in every one of them, give Ease to our Hearts by a penitent Confession of our Offences, make our Claim to his promised Mercy with most joyful Gratitude, vow to him chearfully a more vigilant Obedience, feel a double Satisfaction in every Comfort from having received it as his Gift, and disburthen ourselves of every Anxiety, by committing to his Providence all our Wants, and all our Cares.

Every other Love may cause the acutest Misery. The Object of our tenderest earthly Regards may be insensible or ungrateful; may prove many Ways inferior to our Expectation; may be wretched, and make us so; may be snatched away on a sudden for ever. But Love to God is subject to no Disappointment; is indeed a Cure for all that can possibly happen to

us. While we *ſet our Affection on Things above*[s], the chief Treaſure of our Soul muſt ever be ſafe: even *thoſe Things*, that ſeem to be the moſt *againſt us*[t], we are expreſsly aſſured, are *working together* all the while *for our Good*[u]: and the more of our inferior Enjoyments God requires us to ſacrifice to him, the fuller Opportunities he gives us of manifeſting that ſupreme Value for him, which he ſeldom fails to reward amply here, by infuſing into us a Senſe of his Favour, greatly ſuperior to all worldly Pleaſure; but at leaſt *he hath prepared* in Heaven *for them that love him, Things which Eye hath not ſeen, nor Ear heard, neither have entered into the Heart of Man*[w].

Indeed, how large a Part, that Love itſelf, which we have preſerved inviolate through the Trials of Life, will then make of our Felicity; when we ſhall be raiſed above all our preſent low Objects of Deſire, and have every Faculty of our Souls adapted to embrace the only worthy one; when we ſhall experience his immediate beatific Preſence, feel Joys unutterable, flowing directly from him, and be compleatly aſſured, that *this God is our God for ever and ever*[x]: how tranſporting the Move-

[s] Col. iii. 2. [t] Gen. xlii. 36. [u] Rom. viii. 28.
[w] 1 Cor. ii. 9. [x] Pſ. xlviii. 14.

ments of our Affections towards him may then become, is not for us now to say or conceive. But so much Apprehension of it we must surely have, as will shew that our most important Interest lies in forming ourselves to that Disposition of Heart towards him in this Life, which is necessary to our Blessedness in the next. For the principal Felicity of Heaven consists in God: and unless we love him, we cannot enjoy him, or be happy with him.

Let us therefore proceed to consider,

IV. The Methods which infinite Wisdom hath taken to cultivate so excellent a Principle in our Minds.

Love owes its Being to Goodness; and so may be produced, either by a general Contemplation of its Amiableness, or by Favours personally received from it. That we are capable of the former and purer Sort of Love, Delight in a benevolent Character, though we have never been benefited by it, nor possibly can be, is a Truth, of which every Day gives Proofs with Respect to our Fellow-Creatures, whom we affectionately esteem, though inaccessibly distant from us, though dead many Ages before us. And therefore we are doubtless capable also of admiring and adoring the infinitely superior Benevolence of our Creator,

abstracted

abſtracted from the Thought of our own ſharing in it; as indeed we ſurely all of us love him for his Bounty to the reſt of the World, as well as to ourſelves. But then, this mere diſintereſted Affection, though natural to our Hearts, is very weak and languid there, in the midſt of ſo many other Paſſions and Appetites as our Condition upon Earth makes neceſſary for us, and the original Depravity and ſuperadded evil Cuſtoms of Mankind have ſo unhappily ſtrengthened and perverted. Our Hearts are pre-engaged and filled up, for the moſt Part, with temporal, it is well if not with criminal, Objects of Deſire, long before we come ſeriouſly to reflect on the ſpiritual and truly valuable one. Nor, when we do, can mere ſpeculative Meditation upon that be expected to prevail over the importunate Calls which we have to other Attentions: but Experience of his Bounty muſt be added, to invigorate Eſteem by Gratitude. And plentifully it is added by our heavenly Father in his Works of Nature and of Grace. *O that Men would therefore praiſe the Lord for his Goodneſs, and declare the Wonders which he doth for the Children of Men*[y]; that *they would love him, becauſe he firſt loved us*[z]! But Be-

[y] Pſ. cvii. 21. [z] 1 John iv. 19.

nefits received are foon forgotten: and whatever thankful Warmth they may raife, while the Relifh of them is frefh and lively, cools and flattens; till, by long Poffeffion, we grow apt to think every Thing that we enjoy our Due; and feel nothing in Relation to it but Difcontent, if any Part is taken away or diminifhed. Knowing this, our indulgent Maker, that he may attract us more powerfully to himfelf, hath joined with the Experience of prefent Mercies, the Hope of unfpeakably greater to come: and *bleffed is he whofe Hope is in the Lord his God*[*]. For though it be a lefs noble, becaufe more felfifh, Paffion, yet, in the prefent Cafe, it partakes confiderably of fomething moral and religious. Any real Defire of heavenly Blifs muft imply a Degree of Love, both to Virtue and Holinefs, in which it will chiefly confift, and to that holy Being who hath promifed to beftow it. But, alas! worldly and finful Attachments debafe Mens Natures, that they cannot afpire to, cannot earneftly wifh for, any Thing great and excellent. And therefore the wife Ruler of the World hath enforced his Laws by the only remaining Motive, Fear: that they, whom nothing better will influence, may at

[*] Pf. cxlvi. 4.

least

leaſt be influenced by conſidering the preſent Sufferings and future Miſery, awaiting Wickedneſs: a low and ſlaviſh Inducement, it muſt be owned; but however ſo far a good Sign in him who acts upon it, as it ſhews him not to be inflexibly obſtinate in what is Evil. And, remote as it may ſeem from that generous Flame which our Maker ſeeks to kindle in our Breaſts, yet the Son of *Sirach* hath juſtly obſerved, that *the Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of his Love* [b].

Fear, in the firſt Place, can with peculiar Efficacy reſtrain the outward Actions of Men, and keep them from adding Strength to bad Inclinations by Indulgence. Fear, eſpecially of Puniſhment which they know they deſerve, can make their Vices become taſteleſs and unpleaſant to them. And when once they are brought to avoid forbidden Gratifications as hurtful, there is a fair Proſpect, that not only virtuous Behaviour will recommend itſelf, as almoſt every Thing doth, by Cuſtom, but that alſo its intrinſic Fitneſs and Beauty will come to be perceived, and awaken

[b] Ecclus xxv. 12. See Philo de Abrahamo, p. 19. ed. Mangey: and a large Quotation from Maimonides, in Humphreys's Diſſ. on the Reſurrection, prefixed to his Tranſlation of Athenagoras, p. 52, &c.

suitable

suitable Affections. Or, if this be already the Case, and yet vehement Temptations hurry Men on to Sin; (a very common and very pitiable Condition) Fear may be so impressed on the Heart from above, as to overbalance these; free the rational Principle from the Oppression under which it labours, and enable it to resume its rightful Dominion. Then the Conduct will be reformed, the View of Things gradually brighten, and the more ingenuous Affections of Hope and Gratitude, and unmixed Love, spring up and flourish; till at length our Duty and our Maker, which at first we regarded unwillingly, on mere Compulsion, will no longer have Need of any other Force than their own native Attraction, to regulate every Thought of our Souls, and every Action of our Lives.

Thus then appears the Wisdom and the Goodness of those various Methods which God hath taken to unite us finally to himself. He hath planted in our Hearts that pure and disinterested Esteem and Love of moral Perfection, which leads directly to the Esteem and Love of him above all; and without which we should not have been susceptible of genuine Piety and Virtue. But having placed

us, with a Nature prone to go wrong, in a World full of Enticements; he hath not left us to the Guidance of this one Principle; which, though the beſt in itſelf, would have proved inſufficient for our Direction; but hath kindly put us under the Tutorage of ſubordinate Affections, *to train us up in the Way wherein we ſhould go*[c], till we become enlightened enough *to approve the Things that are excellent*[d], and animated enough to purſue them for their own Sakes. Let us therefore give up ourſelves without Scruple to the Influence of every Motive to our Duty, which Reaſon or Scripture ſets before us, of Pleaſure or Terror, of this World or the next[e], and by Reading, Meditation and Prayer, imprint them ſtrongly on our Minds; nor be at all dejected, though perhaps as yet the leaſt worthy of them hath the largeſt Share in our Obedience; as probably it hath for a Time in that which moſt Children pay to their earthly Parents, for whoſe Perſons and Precepts, notwithſtanding, they acquire, by inſenſible Steps, the moſt dutiful and tender Eſteem. But

[c] Prov. xxii. 6. [d] Phil. i. 10.

[e] לשמן בא לשמן לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ובמצוות אפילו שלא שלא שמתוך לשמן. Sota, fol. 22. col. 2. ap. Buxt. Floril. p. 156.

whoever

whoever would ſtrengthen within himſelf this bleſſed Diſpoſition towards God, muſt frequently recollect and inculcate the Conviction, that other Incitements are but the Means, and *Love the End of the Commandment*[f]: that we improve and grow inwardly better under the heavenly Diſcipline, only in Proportion as we advance in unfeigned Affection, and are transformed by it into real Likeneſs to the Supreme Good. Open your Hearts therefore to feel his Goodneſs towards yourſelves, and imitate it towards your Brethren. *For God is Love: and he that dwelleth in Love dwelleth in God, and God in him*[g].

[f] 1 Tim. i. 5. [g] 1 John iv. 16.

SERMON IV.

MATTH. xxii. 39.

And the ſecond is like unto it, Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf.

THIS is the latter Part of our Saviour's Anſwer to the Queſtion, *Which is the great Commandment in the Law?* He had already anſwered ſufficiently, by ſaying, it was the Love of God. But moſt of the *Jews* before whom he ſpoke, thought the beſt Proof of their fulfilling that Duty was a ſcrupulous Exactneſs in ſome, or all, of the ceremonial Precepts that God had enjoined them. And on the Merit of this, they indulged themſelves in great Hardneſs of Heart, even towards their Brethren of the ſame Religion; and in utter Diſregard, if not implacable Hatred, of all who were of a different Religion, perhaps of a different Sect only. So that, if he had carried his

Reply no further, his Hearers, *who had a Zeal for God, but not according to Knowledge*[a], would in all probability have underſtood him according to their own preconceived Notions: and never have ſuſpected him of deſigning to condemn their Superſtition and Uncharitableneſs. Therefore he immediately ſubjoins, from the expreſs Words of *Moſes*[b], another Commandment, which, if they miſinterpreted the firſt, might ſhew them their Miſtake; and if they did not, would plainly appear, to any conſiderate Perſon, *like unto it* in its Nature, and ſecond in its Dignity and Uſe; *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf.* But this alſo the *Jews* contrived to explain in a wrong Manner, that they might gratify wrong Inclinations. For which Reaſon he took an Opportunity to ſet them right. And beſides the *Jews*, Multitudes of others, both before and ever ſince, have done the ſame Thing. Nay ſome, not content with perverting, and ſo diſobeying, have directly found Fault with it.

Yet whoever believes in a wiſe and good Ruler of the World, muſt believe it to be his Will, that Humanity ſhould be practiſed amongſt Men: and whoever feels in himſelf

[a] Rom. x. 2. [b] Lev. xix. 18.

kind

kind Affections, muſt think the Exercife of them his Duty. But then Doubts are raiſed, who are intitled to our Kindneſs, and in what Degree: both which Points therefore the Precept, now before us, briefly determines. And I ſhall explain and vindicate its Determinations, by ſhewing you the Meaning, *firſt*, of the Word *Neighbour*; *ſecondly*, of the Expreſſion, *loving him as ourſelves*: and proving in ſome Meaſure all the Way, but principally at the Concluſion, the Reaſonableneſs and Neceſſity of having ſo much Regard for ſo many as the Text requires.

I. Our *Neighbour* then commonly ſignifies in Scripture, and not ſeldom in Heathen Writers, every Perſon who is placed within our Reach and Influence. Accordingly, St. *Paul*, inſtead of ſaying, he that loveth his Neighbour, ſaith, *he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the Law*[c]. We have uſually the moſt frequent Opportunities of doing Good to thoſe who live with us, or near us. But if any one, however diſtant from us, or unknown to us, particularly wants our Help, he is, in Effect, by that very Thing, brought near us for the Time, and put under our Care. God's Benevolence is abſolutely univerſal: ours ſhould be

[c] Rom. xiii. 8.

extended

extended as far as it can: and the Extent of Mens Power being extremely various and uncertain; (for the meanest Subject may sometimes, by one single Discovery, do more general Service to Mankind, than the greatest Monarch is capable of) the Word *Neighbour* hath this peculiar Advantage, and therefore Propriety, that it contracts or enlarges its Signification, just as the Case demands; and either takes in the Extremities of the Globe, or confines itself to our own Home.

Some have carried their public-spiritedness too far: and piqued themselves on manifesting Good-will to their Fellow-Creatures, by Undertakings out of their Province, and even beyond their Abilities; while their proper Neighbours, those with whom they had close Connexions, and their proper Business, that which their Circumstances bound them to mind, were disregarded: an injudicious Conduct, when it proceeds from the best Intentions; but highly blamable, if Vanity, or a meddling Temper, be the Source of it: on which Head these Persons would do well to examine themselves. But the far more ordinary Fault is the opposite one: narrowing the Bounds of our friendly Dispositions, and excluding those

from

from the Benefit of being our Neighbours, who have a Right to it.

The principal Causes of this are three: Hatred, Pride and Selfishness.

1. One chief Ground of Hatred long hath been, and is, Diversity of Faith or Worship: of which Case we have a most remarkable Instance, *Luke* x. 25, &c. There *a certain Lawyer standing up, and tempting* our Saviour with the Question, *What shall I do to inherit eternal Life*; he draws from his own Mouth the Answer, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and thy Neighbour as thyself*: then tells him, *Thou hast answered right: This do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing*, as the Evangelist observes, *to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my Neighbour?* imagining, no Doubt, as the Sequel shewed, and as most of his Countrymen thought at that Time, and many Ages after[d], if they do not still, that none but the Members of his own Communion deserved the Name; and that all others were to be deemed unrelated to him, and held in Abhorrence. This abominable Notion our blessed Lord might have confuted by numerous Passages of the Old Testament[e]: but he thought it more useful to

[d] See Lightfoot's Harm. of New Test. and on this History.

[e] Exod. xxii. 21. xxiii. 9. Lev. xix. 33, 34. Deut. x. 19, &c.

humble the vain Man, by convicting him from the Testimony of his Conscience, and making him confess, without perceiving it, how unjust his Interpretation was. For this End he tells him the moving Story, that you all know, of the *Jew* and the *Samaritan*; of which two Nations the former detested the latter beyond all others; and having easily brought him to declare, that the *Samaritan* had acted the neighbourly Part, as he ought, to the *Jew*; it evidently followed, that a *Jew*, upon Occasion, should act the same Part to a *Samaritan*. *Which thinkest thou was Neighbour to him that fell amongst the Thieves? And he said, He that shewed Mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise.* O that all Christians of all Denominations had learned, or would yet learn, from hence and from the whole Tenour of the Gospel, what some of them in particular are lamentably ignorant of, or worse: that Kindness and Tenderness, and much more Justice and Equity, are due to those of every Sect and Party, from whom they differ the most widely; and due, as a Condition of their *inheriting eternal Life!*

Another Thing, which often withholds our kind Regard from very fit Objects of it, and excites Hatred to them, is Rivalship in Profit, Advance-

Advancement, Affection, Reputation. And we may see in the World, perhaps feel in ourselves, if we examine, as we every one should, that Competitions, not only about Matters of some Weight, but the merest Trifles, can turn the best Neighbours, the nearest Relations, the dearest Friends, into absolute Strangers, if not bitter Enemies. Nay the bare Success of others, where we neither were nor could be their Competitors, is enough sometimes to alienate our Hearts from them to a strange Degree. Yet surely we ought not to be hated by others, either for aiming at, or obtaining Advantages, by any fair Means; nor consequently they by us. Nay, should they, in such a Case, thwart an important Interest of ours, to secure an inconsiderable one of their own: even this, though a sad Defect of Generosity, may in Strictness of Speech be no Injustice.

But further, supposing a Man hath directly done us a palpable Injury, still he is our Neighbour. Perhaps it was ignorantly, or inadvertently, or from such Frailty, as we and all Men are liable to: or it is but a slight or a single Offence: or we had provoked him to it; or received Favours from him, that overbalance it, or he hath good Qualities in other Respects,

that intitle him to our Eſteem. Or if he be, on the whole, wicked: yet poſſibly he is not incorrigible. While we are too much offended to bear with him, our heavenly Father, whom he hath much more offended, bears with him; and is graciouſly trying all Methods to reclaim him. You will ſay, "God cannot be hurt by "his Wickedneſs." Why, neither need you. By Patience, you may always turn it to your ſpiritual Improvement: by Prudence, you may generally avoid any temporal Harm from it. You may, if it be neceſſary, puniſh him for it: yet conſider him as one whom you could heartily wiſh to treat more gently.

2. The ſame bad Effect, that Reſentment hath on ſome, Pride alone hath on others: they cannot allow ſuch low Creatures, as the Multitude are, to claim their Notice, and even their Love, by a preſumptuous Name, which implies a Sort of Equality with them. But indeed they are not only our Neighbours, but our Brethren: for God *hath made of one Blood all that dwell on the Face of the Earth*[f]. They have the ſame Principles of human Nature, the ſame Rights of human Society, the ſame Protection of Divine Providence here, the ſame

[f] Acts xvii. 26.

Covenant

Covenant of eternal Glory hereafter. And if we cannot, for the ſake of theſe Things, overlook the Contemptibleneſs of their outward Appearance, and treat them with Compaſſion and Beneficence, inſtead of Scorn; we are much meaner Wretches than great Numbers of them.

3. A third Inducement to deny others a Claim to our neighbourly Regard is Selfiſhneſs: a worſe Turn of Mind, on ſome Accounts, than either of the former. A Man's Anger and Pride can affect but Part of his Neighbours, uſually a ſmall one: to the reſt he may ſtill be friendly and beneficent. But the ſelfiſh Man acknowledges no Neighbour: is concerned ſolely for himſelf, and what he is pleaſed to reckon his own Intereſt; which he places in Wealth or Rank, Power or Pleaſure. And they who ſeek Wealth only by exceſſive Frugality, are generally diſliked rather more than they deſerve. But ſuch as enrich or advance themſelves by the wickedeſt Rapaciouſneſs and Baſeneſs, provided they live ſplendidly and expenſively, are conſidered with an Indulgence that hath extremely pernicious Fruits. And the moſt abandoned Purſuers of immoral Pleaſure obtain, by their ſhewiſh Gaiety, the Cha-

racter of the beſt natured People imaginable: though they often have originally, and ſeldom fail to acquire, the moſt abſolute Inſenſibility to public Welfare, the ties of Hoſpitality and Friendſhip, the Diſtreſſes of Families, and even of the unhappy Creatures who have believed their Profeſſions of the tendereſt Sentiments.

But next in Guilt to ſuch as mind none but themſelves, is he, that fixes upon one, or ſome few, Relations or Favourites, for the Objects of his whole Affection: a Fault the more dangerous, as poſſibly it may appear to him a Virtue. He is doing his Share of Good: taking Care of thoſe, who naturally, or by a Sort of Adoption, belong to him. And doubtleſs we are peculiarly intruſted with ſuch: but not authorized either to injure or neglect others for the ſake of exalting theſe to a Height that is needleſs, and perhaps hurtful even to themſelves. Kindneſs of Heart was planted in Men, not to divide the World into little Parties, each of which ſhould keep ſeparate from and be zealous againſt the reſt; but to unite all, as much as could be, into one Neighbourhood, indeed one Body, animated with one Soul. It is not for our Family, or our Friends alone,

that

that God is concerned, or would have us concerned: but univerſal Good is his End, and univerſal Good-will is the great Inſtrument which he hath given us to promote it. Therefore we muſt always bear in Mind the common Relation of Man to Man: and, whenever it is doubtful whether that, or the particular Ties of Blood or Intimacy require the Preference, far from following the ſtrongeſt Propenſity blindfold, we ſhould labour to preſerve the ſinivereſt Impartiality in forming our Judgment: for that and that only will effectually plead our Excuſe, if we err, as without Queſtion we often do.

Having now ſeen the ſcriptural and rational Extent of the Phraſe, *Thy Neighbour*, let us conſider

II. What, and how neceſſary, that Love is, which the Commandment in the Text enjoins us to bear him. This, I hope, hath appeared already in ſome Meaſure: but muſt be ſhewn more diſtinctly, becauſe too many object, that they cannot help hating ſome Perſons, and ſee no Cauſe to love many others.

Now, it ſhould be conſidered, we have two Sorts of Love: one of Eſteem, founded on the Opinion that Men are deſerving; the other, of mere Benevolence, founded on the

Knowledge that they are capable of Pleaſure and Pain. The former we may juſtly be expected to have for all we can: the latter, for all abſolutely. There are People in the World, for whom we cannot well have much Eſteem. Yet every one hath ſome valuable Qualities. Thoſe whom we diſlike, it is great Odds, have more than we allow them: poſſibly, were it not for our Paſſions and Prejudices, we ſhould find ſeveral of them to be highly worthy and amiable. And, though we are not always obliged to be acquainted with their Merit, we are obliged not to detract from it. But, whatever Ground we may have to think ill of them, Nothing hinders us from wiſhing well to them. If they are bad, is there not great Need of wiſhing they were better? Continuing ſuch as they are, is it not reaſonable to wiſh them every Enjoyment, that will do no Harm to them or others? Do they not often in this World, and will they not certainly in the next, pay dearly enough for their Wickedneſs? And is it not the Part of Humanity then to exerciſe Pity towards them; and leave Vengeance to Him whoſe it is?

"But they are our Enemies: is that a Title "to our Love?" No, certainly. You are not commanded

commanded to love them becauſe they are your Enemies, or the more for being ſo: but only, in a due Meaſure, notwithſtanding they are your Enemies. Perhaps indeed they are not ſo: at leaſt, to near the Degree that you imagine. But if they were; hath not God loved us, and ſent his Son to die for us, *when we were Enemies*[g]? Hath he not abundant Right to expect this Return from us? Doth he not expreſsly tell us, he expects it? Hath he not planted a natural Principle of Relenting and Forgiveneſs in us? And is he not ready to aſſiſt us continually, by his Grace, in the Revival and Cultivation of it?

But you will ſay, "Even to our Enemies "we will do no Wrong: ſhould a proper Oc-"caſion offer, we will do them Service: and "then, how can it ſignify any Thing, what "our Affections to them are?" Why, you may profeſs to behave thus, without loving them at all; and you may poſſibly deſign it: but you will not keep up to it. Such as your Affections are, ſuch will your Actions be: and endeavouring to reſtrain the latter, without amending the former, you will find, is continual Uneaſineſs, and much Labour, to little Purpoſe. Rectifying your inward Diſpoſition

[g] Rom. v. 10.

is

is going to the Root of the Matter. To think of your Neighbour with Mildneſs and Candour, and therefore behave to him with Equity and Kindneſs, is a plain Way. But when you pretend never to do him Harm, though you always wiſh it him; and to be ready to promote his Happineſs, while you deſire his Miſery: either you are not in Earneſt, or you do not know yourſelf; it is too hard for human Strength. So that in this, indeed, in every Inſtance, where Chriſtianity may ſeem to have made our Duty more difficult, by enjoining the Reformation of our Hearts as well as our Lives, it hath on the contrary made it practicable and eaſy, by putting us in the only true Method. Beſides, regulating the one, without the other, if we could do it, would be utterly inſufficient to anſwer our Maker's great End, the purifying of our Natures, and exalting us to a Capacity of heavenly Bliſs. The Affections, in the moral Senſe, are the Man. And if you give up to God your outward Actions only, your Sacrifice is defective and unacceptable. You will plead, it may be, that to him you give up your whole Soul: for you love God intirely, though you hate bad Men. But loving them, 'tis one main Proof which he requires of your loving him. If you loved, you

would obey, you would imitate him. And therefore St. *John* declares, *If a Man ſay, I love God, and hateth his Brother, he is a Liar*[h].

Obſerve alſo, that as your Love to your Brethren muſt be inward and ſincere, ſo it muſt have in View, not merely their preſent Gratification, but their laſting Benefit, even in Oppoſition to that; and not merely their Welfare in this World, but in the next too. For never was there ſurely a more dreadful Abuſe of Words, than to call that Good-nature, which complacently allows Acquaintance, Dependants, Friends, Relations ever ſo near, to go on unmoleſted to Ruin, here and hereafter: nay, too often, directly invites and leads them to it. The Scripture, in prohibiting this Behaviour, gives it the oppoſite Name, and very juſtly. *Thou ſhalt not hate thy Brother in thine Heart: thou ſhalt rebuke thy Neighbour, and not ſuffer Sin upon him*[i]. Whence, take Notice again, that mere Deſire of Good to another, when more is in our Power, will by no Means be ſufficient. Love is an active Principle: and if we ſtop ſhort, be it through Penurиouſneſs, or be it through Indolence, contented with only wiſhing well to thoſe, whom with moderate Pains

[h] 1 John iv. 20. [i] Lev. xix. 17.

and

and Expence we might actually serve; it is leaving that Affection to spend itself in doing Nothing, unless it be cheating us with an Imagination of our being better than we are, which God hath commanded us to cherish and exert for the noblest Purposes.

But admitting, that we are to *love our Neighbour* in this Manner, still doth not the Command of loving him *as ourselves*, extend to something impossible? Certainly not. For we meet with several Instances of Persons being said to love others *as their own Souls*, or themselves, both in the sacred[k] and profane Writers[l]: and we are to understand the Phrase agreeably to their Meaning; not to stretch it farther than they can mean. In Scripture, at least, it doth

[k] Deut. xiii. 6. 1 Sam. xviii. 3. xx. 17.

[l] In quibus enim eadem studia sunt, eædemque voluntates, in his fit, ut æque quisque altero delectetur, ac se ipso: efficiturque id, quod Pythagoras ultimum in amicitia putavit, ut unus fiat ex pluribus. Cic. Off. i. 17. Ex quo perspicitur, cum hanc benevolentiam late longeque diffusam vir sapiens in aliquem pari virtute præditum contulerit, tum illud effici quod quibusdam incredibile videatur, sit autem necessarium, ut nihil sese plus quam alterum diligat. Quid enim est quod differat, cum sint cuncta paria? Cic. de Legg. i. 12. where see more. But he requires this Degree of Love not to every Man, but between perfectly wise and good Men. The Doctrine of the Epicureans was; Nullo modo possumus amicitiam tueri, nisi æque amicos & nos ipsos diligamus. Cic. de Fin. i. 20. where see more.

not

not denote the very higheſt Affection that we are capable of. For the Duty of loving God is plainly deſigned to be expreſſed in ſtronger Terms, than that of loving our Neighbour. Yet the latter muſt imply, not only Good-will as real as we bear to ourſelves; for, if it be inconſiderable, it will be ineffectual: but alſo a large Degree of Good-will; for that alſo we bear to ourſelves. And farther, we are to love him in Proportion as we love ourſelves: to pay a more attentive Regard to his Intereſts, the more powerfully we are addicted by Nature or Cuſtom to regard our own; and ſo preſerve the Balance of our Affections in due Poiſe. This, however, we ſhall do much better, if we alſo take the Expreſſion, as we juſtly may, to comprehend an Injunction, that we love and conſider our Neighbour juſt as much as we ſhould love and conſider ourſelves, were we in his Caſe. For, though we be equally affected by his Circumſtances and our own, ſo far as we can know and feel both, this will carry us no unfit Lengths in his Favour: becauſe we cannot know and feel both in the ſame Degree: and, though we could, no Harm would follow. Indeed we are ſometimes bound, in the practical Senſe, to love our Neighbour more than ourſelves: to ſhew a

greater Concern for his Good, not only than we do ſhew for our own; for which, God knows, in the principal Points, we often ſhew none at all; but than we ought to ſhew for our own: becauſe a very important Advantage of his may be in Queſtion; and a ſmall one, in Compariſon, of ours; which it would be Meanneſs not to ſlight: or the Advantage of many may be in one Scale, and our own ſingly in the other. Now, when that happens, we may be obliged to go ſo far as to *lay down our Lives for our Brethren*[m]; not only for their eternal, but temporal Welfare. Still, unqueſtionably, in all Caſes that but approach towards an Equality, we act allowably in preferring ourſelves, where no Obligation of Juſtice or Truth exacts the contrary. And, in the endleſs Variety of Circumſtances that occur in human Life, all that could be done by Precept, at leaſt by any one ſhort Precept, and ſuch Mankind muſt have, was to give as awakening a Caution as poſſible againſt the greateſt Danger, and as clear a Direction as poſſible how to avoid it; which, I hope, you are ſenſible, the Precept before us hath done; and then to leave both right and wrong Minds to ſhew what they are: the one, by cheerfully

[m] 1 John iii. 16.

taking, and diligently ſeeking, if there be Need, fit Opportunities of doing Acts of Humanity; the other, by raiſing Scruples, inventing Evaſions, and neglecting the plaineſt Calls, becauſe ſome are doubtful.

Men may indeed be too prone to follow every good-natured Impulſe. And the few who have Cauſe to ſuſpect they are, ſhould conſider what they owe to themſelves, and to other Demands upon them, preſent, or probably future, as well as to the Object which now ſtrikes them: they ſhould aſk the Judgment of pious and prudent Friends: they ſhould have ſome Regard to the Judgment even of the leſs good Part of the World; elſe they may poſſibly diſcredit the Duty which they would wiſh to recommend. But giving ourſelves up to be influenced ſolely or chiefly by common Opinion and Practice, is the Way to extinguiſh every Thing that is right in us. To a proper Degree therefore the Son of *Sirach*'s Advice is neceſſary to be obſerved: *In every good Work truſt thy own Soul, for this is the keeping of the Commandment*[a]. Upright Meaning, with a moderate Share of Diſcretion, will be a ſafe Guide through whatever Perplexities may at any Time ariſe in Relation to this Precept.

[a] Ecclus xxxii. 23.

Still

Still you will ſay perhaps, that, explain and limit it as we will, it is very hard after all, that, in order to obey God, and demonſtrate our Love to him, we muſt diſobey the Dictates of the ſtrongeſt and uſefulleſt Principle he hath planted in our Nature, the Love of ourſelves, and adopt others, often of very undeſerving Characters, in our own Room. But conſider: Self-Love is not Happineſs; it is not always the Inſtrument of procuring Happineſs; but makes us uneaſy and wretched. It can procure Happineſs no otherwiſe than by exciting us to gratify our natural Inclinations, when that will do us Good; and reſtraining us from gratifying them, when it would do us Harm. Now Love to our Fellow-Creatures is one of our natural Inclinations. We all feel and ſhew it to be ſo, in ſome Inſtances, more or leſs. And why is not the Indulgence of it, within the Bounds now preſcribed, as likely to do us much Good and little Harm, as that of any other? It is a pleaſing Movement of Mind in itſelf. Reflection upon it affords a ſecond Pleaſure. We approve and eſteem ourſelves for having it, and for attempting what it prompts us to. If we ſucceed, we have exquiſite Joy: if we fail, it is no inconſiderable Comfort, that we meant well.

And,

And, ordinarily speaking, all around us com-
mend and applaud us for it. By these Means
our Goodness often brings us great worldly
Advantages, and very seldom is attended with
no worldly Disadvantages. For there are many
and daily Ways of exercising it without Ex-
pence or Trouble. And if the rest do cost us
something, perhaps we can well bear it, and
not be at all the worse. But, were it more,
do our Indulgences of other Inclinations cost
us Nothing? Do not the Debaucheries, the
Resentments, the Amusements, the Vanities,
the Caprices of Men, interfere much more fre-
quently and irreconcileably with the truest and
nearest even of their temporal Interests, than
the Love of their Neighbour doth? "But
" these Things, you will say, give much
" higher Delight." Perhaps not. For Mul-
titudes pursue with strange Eagerness what
yields them very little Satisfaction. At best,
it is a very unwise Delight. And possibly you
are pleased with your present Objects of De-
sire, only because you have set yourselves to be
pleased with them. Set yourselves therefore
to be pleased with promoting the Welfare of
others; and you will find your Account in it
beyond any Thing in this World.

 Indeed

Indeed almoſt all the Miſery of this World proceeds from the Want of it. The unavoidable Evils of Life are nothing to thoſe which we bring upon one another voluntarily, by Ill-Nature, Inſenſibility and heedleſs Diſregard. Theſe are the heavy Sufferings, that every one complains of and groans under, and always muſt, if every one will be guilty of ſuch Behaviour: and Nothing can put an End to it, but ſocial Love. Inſtead therefore of being againſt the Intereſt of any Man, it is moſt eſſentially for the Intereſt of all Men: and were it to prevail univerſally upon Earth, no Injury would be attempted, no Act of Kindneſs neglected. For, as St. *Paul* argues: *This, Thou ſhalt not commit Adultery, Thou ſhalt not kill, Thou ſhalt not ſteal, Thou ſhalt not bear falſe Witneſs, Thou ſhalt not covet; and if there be any other Commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this Saying, Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf. Love worketh no Ill to his Neighbour;* allows no Commiſſion, no Omiſſion, that may be hurtful to him: *therefore Love is the fulfilling of the Law*[1]: all the Obligations of human Society are ſummed up in it. With perfect Juſtice then doth our bleſſed Lord declare, that *on*

[1] Rom. xiii. 9, 10.

theſe

these two Commandments, right Affection to God and to Man, both which imply it towards ourselves, *hang all the Law and the Prophets*[m].

But still, it may be, you will plead, "how "happy soever the World would become, were "all Men influenced by these Principles; yet, "since they are not, why must we?" Because the Whole can be amended only by the separate Amendment of each Part. "But, you "will say, unless the rest will amend, of "which, to speak moderately, there is no "Likelihood in our Time, the Wickedness "and Misery of Mankind must, if we are to "love them so well, and seek their Good so "earnestly, occasion us much fruitless Pain, "innumerable Disappointments and melan-"choly Reflections." Why, so it will, if we engage in too great, or too difficult, or too many Undertakings; if we raise our Expectations too high; or suffer Opposition, either to kindle us into Vehemence, or plunge us into Despair. But we may go on very comfortably, if we preserve the true Temper: exerting a calm settled Benevolence on all fit Occasions, because we ought; without hoping to succeed very often, or to produce on the whole any remarkable Change for the better: but

m Matth. xxii. 40.

labouring the more conſtantly for this very Reaſon, that not a little of what we do will, to all Appearance, with Reſpect to others, be Labour loſt. *In the Morning ſow thy Seed, and in the Evening withhold not thine Hand: for thou knoweſt not, whether ſhall proſper, this or that; or whether they both ſhall be alike good*[n]. But thus much we know however, that the ſeemingly moſt unprofitable Exerciſes of Kindneſs will not only be of unſpeakable Benefit to ourſelves in the Upſhot, which might ſurely ſuffice us, but will prove ſome Means in the Hands of Divine Wiſdom for bringing forth at length general Good out of all Evil. Being therefore thus *Labourers together with God*[o], why ſhould we not be happy in our Proportion; as he is perfectly, notwithſtanding the Failure of his gracious Purpoſes towards a World, which he loves infinitely better, than the beſt of us can?

But you will argue further yet: "Whatever "Peace we may have within, we ſhall have "none without, but be laughed at for poor "tame Wretches, and trampled on ſecurely." No ſuch Thing. Though few may imitate you, very few will in earneſt deſpiſe you, and fewer ſtill attack you in any material Point. Love to

[n] Eccl. xi. 6. [o] 1 Cor. iii. 9.

all Men cannot often provoke any Man. And in Case of Assault, you are not forbidden the just Methods of Self-preservation; you are commanded to be prudent, as well as *harmless*[p]: you have the Laws to protect you: all the good to support you, from Inclination; and most of the bad, if for no better a Reason, yet lest they should suffer next. You will scruple, I own, taking some Advantages, by which they often succeed: but you will also avoid some Disadvantages, by which they are often ruined. And, besides human Helps, you will have the Providence of God on your Side, both to defend you, and perhaps to reward you openly even here. Or, should he see it best for you to go without temporal Recompences, nay to suffer temporal Inconveniences ever so grievous: bear but all patiently from a Sense of Duty to Him, and you will be filled with Consolation in this World, and assured of Glory in that which is to come.

Trust him therefore boldly with the absolute Direction of your Hearts and Lives. Let those, who resolve to be too cunning for their Maker, suppress and extinguish every friendly Sentiment in their Breasts, be blind and deaf to the

[p] Matth. x. 16.

Diſtreſſes of all around them, purſue with unrelenting Fervour their own Intereſts, their own Pleaſures, their own Schemes of Malevolence, *hateful and hating one another*[q]. But let us *be ſimple concerning Evil, and wiſe* only *unto that which is Good*[r]: *ſhew Mercy with Cheerfulneſs, love without Diſſimulation, be kindly affectioned, in Honour preferring one another, diſtributing to the Neceſſities of the Saints: rejoice with them that rejoice, weep with them that weep; be not high-minded, but condeſcend to Men of low Eſtate*[s]: look with Pleaſure on the Virtues, the Accompliſhments, the Succeſs of others; be ſlow to believe their Faults, think of them with Concern, and treat them with Mildneſs: *love* even *our Enemies, bleſs them that curſe us, do Good to them that hate us, and pray for them that deſpitefully uſe us, and perſecute us. For ſo ſhall we be the Children of our Father, which is in Heaven; who maketh his Sun to riſe on the Evil and the Good, and ſendeth Rain on the Juſt and on the Unjuſt*[t].

[q] Tit. iii. 3. [r] Rom. xvi. 19. [s] Rom. xii. 8—16. [t] Matth. v. 44, 45.

SER-

SERMON V.

MATTH. iv. 1.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the Wilderness, to be tempted of the Devil.

AS the Word of God acquaints us with many Things of great Importance, concerning our present and future Condition, which we could not else have known: so it opens to us particularly, a very interesting Scene, in the Discoveries which it makes of our Connexions with the Inhabitants of the invisible World, both good and bad. Indeed, that various Orders of rational Beings besides Man, and superior to him, exist in this Universe, is of itself extremely probable. That some, even of the highest of them, should become wicked, is only a Wonder of the same Kind; as that too many of the best Abilities amongst Men should make the worst Use of them. That for their Wickedness they should be *cast down*[a] from *their first*

[a] 2 Pet. ii. 4.

Estate[b], and confined to a very different one, is a natural Consequence of the Divine Justice and Rectitude. That, though Sufferers already for their Crimes, they should yet be *reserved unto the severer Judgment of the great Day*, is but just the very Thing that Reason teaches concerning the Sinners of the human Race also. That they should be desirous in the mean Time of seducing us into Transgression, is very natural: for we see the profligate amongst ourselves desirous every Day of doing the like. That this should be possible for them, is by no Means inconceivable: for, since the material Frame of our Earth is confessedly liable to powerful Influences from other Parts of the Creation, why may not the intelligent Natures in it be so too? That evil Spirits should be permitted to assault us in a Degree consistent with our Freedom of Will, is evidently as reconcileable both to the Holiness and Goodness of God, as that we are suffered to tempt one another, often perhaps full as dangerously. That they should be capable of conveying their Suggestions to us, and we not know their Manner of doing it, can hardly be called strange: for we scarce know the Manner how any one Thing in the World is done, if we examine it to the Bot-

[b] Jude 6.

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tom; not even how we convey our own Thoughts to those with whom we converse. And that we should be exposed to these Temptations, without perceiving them to proceed from any such Cause, is far from incredible: for we are frequently influenced, and strongly too, by Persons of no higher Powers and Abilities than ourselves, without perceiving that they influence us at all.

But, though every one of these Things is rationally supposeable, yet Scripture only can satisfy us, that they are true in Fact: and so accordingly it fully doth. For though it tells us, that bad Angels are held *in everlasting Chains under Darkness*[c], it tells us likewise, that *our Adversary the Devil as a roaring Lion walketh about*, meaning, doubtless, within the Extent of his Chain, *seeking whom he may devour*[d]. And yet, even after the Testimony of Scripture given to these Doctrines; as they relate to Matters which lie out of Sight, and therefore affect the Mind but faintly, unless the Truth and Importance of them be carefully impressed upon it, we receive them too commonly with only a wavering Kind of half Belief, which produces no Manner of serious Thought about them. And so by Degrees

[c] Jude 6. [d] 1 Pet. 5. 8.

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we first overlook, and then doubt, and then reject, one Part after another of what is revealed concerning the hidden Regions of the Creation; (as, indeed, if once we begin, where shall we stop?) till, at length, instead of *walking*, as Christians ought, *by* that *Faith*[e], which *is the Evidence of Things not seen*[f], we come to consider earthly Objects as the only Realities, and Heaven and Hell, and the Inhabitants of each, as Nothing at all.

Some, it must be owned, far from disbelieving what they understand their Bible to teach on these Subjects, make it almost a Point of Religion to believe a great deal more: whereas the plain and safe Rule certainly is, to go as far as Scripture goes, but also to stop where Scripture stops. For whatever Notions are credulously entertained, beyond its Warrant, will always, in the Event, weaken, instead of confirming, the Persuasion of its genuine Articles. But, undeniably, the prevailing Extreme at present is, that of questioning, or slighting, though we do not question, whatever is placed a little without the Reach of our own Faculties, be it ever so clearly asserted by our Maker himself. This Turn of Mind is highly undutiful; and tends to mislead us,

[e] 2 Cor. v. 7. [f] Heb. xi. 1.

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in the Whole of Religion first, and then of common Life. The Remedies for it are, to think of ourselves with Humility, and read and consider the Doctrines of God's Word with reverent Attention. That of our being tempted by invisible Powers needs not have any wrong Effects upon us, and may have very right ones. For, as these Temptations are not distinguishable by us from those which arise of themselves in our own Breasts, and may be resisted effectually by the same Methods, the Belief of them can by no just Consequence drive us either into Superstition or Despondency. But the Consideration of having such an additional Adversary, besides the World and the Flesh, must naturally increase our Watchfulness, and thankful Dependence on the Help of Divine Grace: and the Reflexion that, in committing Sin, we are complying with the Suggestions, and gratifying the Malice, of the Enemies of God, of our own Souls, and of the whole Creation, cannot but incline us to a strong Abhorrence even of such Transgressions, as we might else have been disposed to view in a pleasing Light.

Now, of all the Passages of Scripture which relate to this Point of Doctrine, there are none more

more instructive, than those of the Evangelists, in which we find our blessed Lord himself assaulted by the Tempter: whose Victory, for that Reason, the Wisdom of the Church hath taken Care to set before our Eyes in the Gospel for this Day, as the properest Admonition to us in the Beginning of the present Season: the Business of which, if we purpose to be at all the better for it, is arming ourselves against those Temptations with which we may meet hereafter, as well as humbling ourselves for having yielded to so many already. And therefore I shall now endeavour,

I. To explain this Part of our Saviour's History.

II. To point out, in a few Words, the practical Uses that flow from it.

I. To explain this Part of his History.

The Number of wicked Spirits is represented in Scripture as very large. And yet one only, denoted by the Name of *Satan*, or the Devil, is generally mentioned as inticing Men to Sin. The Reason of this, in other Places of Holy Writ, may be, that, as they are all united under one Head, and engaged in one Design, they are to be regarded by us as one Adversary: for, in the common Language of War, we speak of the Enemy in the singular Number, when yet

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we mean a Multitude. But there is more eſpecial Ground for it, in the Text, as unqueſtionably *the Prince of the Demons*[g] himſelf would perſonally engage in ſo arduous a Combat, as that with *Jeſus* muſt appear likely to prove. That he, who bears Ill-will to all Men, ſhould earneſtly wiſh to miſlead and pervert one, whom he could not but ſee to be a very extraordinary Man, and ſent on ſome Errand of ſingular Benefit to the human Race, was to be expected. And that he ſhould hope to do it, may be accounted for, partly from hence: that as wicked Men, though of eminent Abilities, are perpetually attempting very abſurd Things, ſo may wicked Spirits too: as indeed all Wickedneſs implies, in its very Nature, the abſurdeſt Hope and Attempt in the World; that of being Gainers by diſobeying a wiſe and juſt Ruler, of infinite Power. Beſides, the Devil had fallen himſelf, even without a Tempter: he had ſucceeded by the Means of Temptation againſt the firſt Man, and more or leſs againſt all Men ſince; and probably he knew not diſtinctly what Manner of Perſon

[g] Matth. ix. 34. The Word here is not Διαβολος, nor is that ever uſed of wicked Spirits in the Plural Number: and therefore it is properer to ſay Demons, than Devils.

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this was whom he aſſaulted. For, though he might know him to have been declared the Son of God, ſtill that Name is capable of various Meanings. Or, if he knew him to be the promiſed Meſſiah, yet he might imagine that this Promiſe, as well as others, was a conditional one, though no Condition was expreſſed; and therefore liable to be defeated. Or, at leaſt, Rage might urge him to moleſt, though he deſpaired to overcome.

But then, why *the Lord of all*[h], who quickly afterwards caſt out Demons with a Word, ſubmitted previouſly to ſuch repeated Indignities, as theſe Trials made of him by the Power of Darkneſs, perhaps we cannot fully ſay. But this at leaſt may be ſaid very ſafely, that, for any Thing we know, it might *behove him*, not only, in general, *to be made in all Things like unto his Brethren*, that ſo he might reſiſt the Devil on our Behalf perfectly, whom we reſiſt very imperfectly; but, in particular, to give the Enemy all Advantages and Opportunities, in order to make his Defeat more conſpicuous: beſides that we may gather, as I ſhall ſhew you in the Concluſion, much Inſtruction and much Comfort from the Benefit of his Example, and from the condeſcending Aſſu-

[h] Acts x. 36.

rance,

rance, which *his having suffered himself, being tempted*, affords, that he will *succour* us when we *are tempted* also[l]. The wicked one made this Attack upon him at the Beginning of his public Appearance, because undoubtedly he thought no Time was to be lost for preventing the Good intended by it. And *Jesus was led up of the Spirit* purposely to meet him, because the Divine Omniscience foresaw the Event. As for the Choice of the Wilderness for the Scene of Action; we find, that he often retired into Places of Solitude for Meditation and Prayer: and no Wonder if he did it now, before he undertook the inexpressibly weighty Office, for which a Voice from Heaven had just marked him out. The Addition of Fasting to his Devotions was another Instance (his Baptism had already been one) of *fulfilling all Righteousness*[k], by doing, in Obedience to God's general Appointment, what, if he did not want, good Men in all Ages have experienced, when used on fit Occasions, and to a proper Degree, very needful and beneficial. His fasting the determinate Number of forty Days, leads us immediately to recollect, that *Moses* the Giver of the Law, and *Elias* the

[l] Heb. ii. 17, 18. [k] Matth. iii. 15.

Chief of the Prophets, did the very same Thing in their Times, which he, who *came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets*[1], did now. Nor are there wanting remarkable Coincidences of the Number of forty on other Occasions. What Secret of Providence may lie concealed under them, appears not yet: future Occurrences, perhaps, will shew it. But, in the mean while, we may venture to say this: that as our Saviour used so long and total an Abstinence but once, and we are incapable of using it so much as once; repeating a faint shadow of it every Year cannot be our Duty merely from his Example: and that, neither himself nor his Apostles having laid any such Command upon Christians, the Fast of *Lent* stands only on the Footing of human, though ancient, Injunction, and private Prudence.

During these forty Days, it is observed by St. *Mark*, our blessed Redeemer *was with the wild Beasts:* which Words must imply, else they are of no Significance, that the fiercest Animals were awed by his Presence, and so far laid aside their savage Nature for the Time: thus verifying literally what *Eliphaz* in *Job* saith figuratively concerning a good Man. *At De-*

[1] Matth. v. 17.

struction

ſtruction and Famine ſhalt thou laugh, neither ſhalt thou be afraid of the Beaſts of the Earth: for they ſhall be at Peace with thee[n]. Nor doth St. *Mark* only, but St. *Luke* alſo acquaint us, that throughout theſe whole *forty Days he was tempted of Satan*[o]; though in what particular Manner, they have not ſaid; nor perhaps did he inform his very Apoſtles: there being many Things in his Life, that were myſterious even to them; and no Marvel then, if they are ſo to us.

When the Days of his miraculous Faſting were completed, the Tempter came to him in a viſible Form: a Thing, which we have neither any Reaſon from hence to fear will ever be our own Caſe, or to believe is ever the Caſe of other common Men; nor yet to doubt of its having been his, from its never being ours or theirs. For the whole Life of *Chriſt* was ſo full of Wonders, that the Hiſtory of his Temptation is perfectly agreeable to the reſt: and we muſt either queſtion all, or no Part. In what Likeneſs the Devil appeared, we are not told: probably reſembling one of the good *Angels*, who ſeem by St. *Mark* to have attended our Saviour, and *miniſtered unto him*[p], in the

[n] Job v. 22, 23. [o] Mark i. 13. Luke iv. 2. [p] Mark i. 13.

Course of this wonderful Dispensation, before his Combat, as well as after his Conquest. We learn from St. *Paul*, that *Satan* hath been sometimes *transformed into an Angel of Light*[q]. And such a Transformation, on the Occasion before us, not only suits best with his two last Temptations, but was certainly the likeliest to procure him Success in any of them. At least he certainly did not appear what he was: for that would intirely have frustrated his Intent. And accordingly we find, that as soon as he knew himself to be discovered, he despaired and fled.

The first Attack which the Tempter made, was grounded on the bodily Necessities of our blessed Lord; now again permitted to feel the Appetite of Hunger; and destitute, where he was, of all Means to satisfy it. On this Foundation the Devil raised a Proposal of refined Artifice: that he should instantly make an Experiment, and give a Proof, of the Truth and Extent of the late Declaration from Heaven in his Favour, *This is my beloved Son*[r], by ordering a supernatural Supply for the Want which pressed him. *If thou be the Son of God, command that these Stones be made Bread*[s]. Every one, perhaps, may not immediately see where the

[q] [illegible] [r] Matth. iii. 17. [s] Chap. iv. 3.

Fault

Fault of this would have been; which is the very Circumſtance that made it a fit Temptation. *Satan* had no Proſpect of being able to lead him at one Step into a groſs Tranſgreſſion: and any real Deviation, however ſmall, from either Piety or Virtue, would have anſwered his End. Now, Compliance with this Counſel would have been a Deviation. The Voice from Heaven alone carried Evidence enough along with it of God's eſpecial Regard to him: and deſiring a yet fuller Demonſtration of it would certainly have argued a blame-worthy Diffidence. He had been ſupported by the ſole Word and Will of his heavenly Father for forty Days: why muſt he now, without any ſufficient Notice of the Change of that Will, attempt a new Miracle for providing himſelf Bread to live on; as if the old one, which enabled him to live without it, had loſt its Force? When God deſigned him to return to the ordinary Way of Life, he would furniſh him with every Thing requiſite for it: but in the Interval, it had been as abſurd for him to think of producing Bread for himſelf in the Wilderneſs, as for *Moſes* to have thought of producing it for the *Iſraelites* there, inſtead of the Manna, rained down from Heaven for their Suſtenance. And therefore he anſwered, with the utmoſt

Propriety, in his own Case, exactly what *Moses* had observed to them upon theirs, *that Man doth not live by Bread only, but by every Word that proceedeth out of the Mouth of the Lord*[t].

The wily Serpent, appearing in all Likelihood perfectly satisfied with this Answer, and convinced that acting otherwise than our Saviour did, would really have been distrusting God, proposes next, (and possibly under Colour of making Amends) to give him the most illustrious Opportunity of shewing the highest Confidence in God that could be. And, the meek *Jesus* patiently yielding to what he clearly discerned the Intention of, the Tempter conveys him through the Air, (no Wonder that he suffered it, for he suffered wicked Men to take much greater Liberties with him afterwards) and places him on one of the Battlements of the Temple of *Jerusalem*: exhorting him to cast himself down in the Sight of all the Worshippers there assembled, and procure that Glory to the Deity, and that Honour to himself, which must be the Consequence of their seeing publickly and literally fulfilled in him that Prediction of the Psalmist concerning a pious Man, which so eminently pious a one as he had certainly both Reason

[t] Deut. viii. 3. Matth. iv. 4.

and

and Faith enough to depend on: *He ſhall give his Angels Charge concerning thee: and in their Hands they ſhall bear thee up, leſt at any Time thou daſh thy Foot againſt a Stone*[u]: poſſibly inſinuating farther, by the Uſe of theſe Words, his own Ambition of being employed as the Inſtrument of ſo noble a Miracle, for which he had juſt before ſhewn himſelf qualified, and the tutelary Spirit of ſo excellent a Perſon. But the Redeemer of Mankind, far from being diſconcerted by the ſudden Change of the Argument, or dazzled by ſo ſpecious a Plea, calmly anſwers by another Text of Scripture, explaining and limiting that, which the Seducer had quoted imperfectly, and applied wrong: *Thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God*[w]. As we ought not from Diffidence to aſk new Proofs of his Power, where we have had ſufficient ones already, ſo neither muſt we from Preſumption urge him to do for us what we have no Need of, and what therefore he hath given us no Right to expect. For they, who throw away the natural Means, which he hath beſtowed on them for preſerving themſelves, forfeit all Title to a ſupernatural Protection.*

Though unſucceſsful in both theſe Aſſaults,

[u] Pſ. xci. 11, 12. Matth. iv. 6.
[w] Deut. vi. 16. Matth. iv. 7.

the Tempter, notwithſtanding, begins another without Delay, probably built on the Defeats which he had undergone. He places our bleſſed Lord, ſtill giving Way to his vain Efforts, on a commanding Eminence; repreſents to him from thence, in extended View, or mimic Imagery, or pompous Deſcription[x], whatever was great and ſplendid in the Kingdoms of the Earth; alledges, that to himſelf, as the Vicegerent of the Almighty, the Dominion of this ſublunary World was granted; over which he was willing to place, on the reaſonable Terms of Homage done to him for it, one, of whoſe ſuperior Underſtanding and Rightneſs of Mind he had now made ſo thorough a Trial. *All this Power will I give thee: for it is delivered unto me. If therefore thou wilt worſhip me, all ſhall be thine*[y]. To each of the former Suggeſtions

x Heuman, Diſſ. Sylloge, tom i. p. i. Diſſ. 7. thinks he only pointed towards each Kingdom, and ſhews that δεικνυω and *oſtendo* ſignify this. Bibl. Germ. 1748, Jan. p. 108. Spartian, in the Life of Severus, ſaith, that from the Top of a high Mountain he ſaw Rome, & *orbem terrarum*. Cyprian, ad Donatum de Gratia Dei, p. 4. Ed. Fell, exhorts him: Pauliſper te crede ſubduci in montis ardui verticem celſiorem, ſpeculare inde rerum infra te jacentium facies; & oculis in diverſa porrectis, ipſe a terrenis contactibus liber, fluctuantis mundi turbines intuere. And hence he ſuppoſes him to ſee the Whole of it.

y Luke iv. 6, 7.

the holy *Jesus* had replied without Emotion: but now, when the Majesty of his heavenly Father was injured, and the Faith of his own Allegiance to him assailed, by so vile a Falsehood, he bears no longer; tells the Hypocrite, he knew him well for the Adversary of God, who had granted to no created Being, much less to him, the Honours, or the Authority, which he claimed; and commands him that Moment to quit his Presence. *Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the Devil leaveth him, and Angels came and ministered unto him*[z], doubtless whatever his Condition required.

All Hopes of seducing him were now at an End. What remained was only to oppose and persecute him. And, as this Method was taken very soon after the former failed, St. *Luke* observes, that *the Devil departed from him* but *for a Season*[a]. Accordingly *Christ* himself expresses the whole of his public Life on Earth by the Phrase of *his Temptations*[b]. But as every Contrivance of *the Ruler of Darkness*[c] against him proved ineffectual; so that, which he laboured

[z] Matth. iv. 10, 11. [a] Luke iv. 13. [b] Luke xxii. 28. [c] Eph. vi. 12.

moſt, and at Length accompliſhed, the taking away of his Life, inſtead of preventing the Erection of our Saviour's rightful Kingdom, gave the mortal Blow to his own uſurped Tyranny. For *through Death* the Son of Man *deſtroyed him who had the Power of Death, that is the Devil*[d]: *and having ſpoiled Principalities and Powers, triumphed over them on his Croſs*[e].

II. I come now to ſpeak briefly of the practical Uſes that flow from this Part of our Saviour's Hiſtory. And the following are not inconſiderable: that the beſt of Men are no more exempt from Temptations than others; but may poſſibly be tried with a larger Share of them, and ſuch as are harder to be withſtood; that every one therefore ought, in every Part of Life, to prepare for them; and no one, merely on Account of his ſuffering ever ſo many, to doubt of the Favour and Love of God: that Allurements to Evil may perhaps beſet us with peculiar Importunity in the Entrance upon our Chriſtian Courſe; but, if we reſiſt them faithfully then, may ceaſe in a great Meaſure afterwards; and God's Grace enable us to go ſafely and honourably through the ſevereſt Conflicts of any other Kind: that Retirement and Medita-

[d] Heb. ii. 14. [e] Col. ii. 14, 15.

tion,

tion, Faſting and Prayer, are the right Preparatives againſt all Solicitations to Sin; which yet may come upon us in the very Midſt of our religious Duties, and ſtricteſt Obſervances; nay, *Satan* may ſeek Advantage from them to miſlead us: that if, even at ſuch Times we are not ſecure, much leſs are we ſo in the Midſt of the Cares and Purſuits, but eſpecially the Pleaſures of Life; by thoughtleſs Indulgence of which, we invite and aid the Tempter, whom we ought to ſhun and oppoſe: that we ſhould never venture out of the plain Road of Duty, to ſupply the moſt urgent Neceſſities; never run into needleſs Danger, in Hope of extraordinary Deliverance; never accept the greateſt Advantages, when offered as the Price of our Innocence: that Riches, and Honours, and Power are the moſt dangerous of Trials, being reſerved for the laſt in the Caſe of our bleſſed Lord: and whoever can reject them inſtantly with Indignation, when offered on ſinful Conditions, as he did, is far advanced in the Road to Perfection: that laying up the Doctrines and Precepts of Scripture in our Hearts, ready for Uſe, is providing the beſt Defence againſt our ſpiritual Enemies; yet that Scripture itſelf may be eaſily perverted to miſguide us, unleſs we carefully interpret one

Part

Part of it by another, and every one by the Deſign of the Whole: that the effectual Way of dealing with all evil Suggeſtions, is to repel them with an immediate, and ſhort, and determinate Anſwer, founded on God's Word; and that permitting them to reply to us, and plead with us, is only giving them a Handle to deceive and deſtroy us: that they, who are led by the Providence of God to meet Difficulties, will, if they aſk it, be filled with the Spirit of God to go through them; and ſo *with the Temptation he will alſo make a Way to eſcape*[f]: or, to ſpeak in St. *James*'s Words, that *if we reſiſt the Devil, he will flee from us; and if we draw nigh to God, he will draw nigh to us*[g]. That ſince *we have not an High Prieſt which cannot be touched with the Feeling of our Infirmities, but* one, *who was in all Points tempted like as we are, we may come boldly* through him *to the Throne of Grace, and find Help in Time of Need.* But then, as he was *tempted without Sin*[h], we muſt imitate, though we cannot equal, him; and really, though not perfectly in this Life, conquer Sin alſo: for only *to him that overcometh will be grant to ſit with him in his Throne*[i]. Yet, as the Tempter *departed*

[f] 1 Cor. x. 13. [g] James iv. 7, 8. [h] Heb. iv. 15, 16. [i] Rev. iii. 21.

from

ſrom our Lord himſelf only *for a Seaſon*, we are not to imagine, that he will ever depart wholly from us: but may ſtill comfort ourſelves, that if we *put on the whole Armour of God, and wreſtle againſt him* as we ought, *we ſhall be able to ſtand againſt* all *his Wiles*[k]: nay, every Attempt to weaken our Virtues, ſhall only prove a wholeſome Exerciſe to ſtrengthen and improve them; till at Length, having *fought the good Fight of Faith*, we ſhall *lay hold on eternal Life*[l]; and not only the Angels, who miniſter to us now Aſſiſtance in our Conflict, ſhall join with our Fellow Saints in applauding our Victory, but *the Captain of our Salvation*[m] himſelf acknowledge us openly for *his good and faithful Soldiers and Servants*[n]. *Bleſſed is the Man that endureth Temptation: for when he is tried, he ſhall receive the Crown of Life, which the Lord hath promiſed to them who love him*[o].

[k] Eph. vi. 11, 12. [l] 1 Tim. vi. 12. [m] Heb. ii. 10.
[n] Matth. xxv. 21. 2 Tim. ii. 3. [o] James i. 12.

SERMON VI.

PHIL. ii. 21.

For all ſeek their own, not the Things which are Jeſus Chriſt's.

THESE Words contain both an Account what the Practice of Mankind is, and alſo an Intimation what it ſhould be. And therefore, in diſcourſing upon them, it will be proper,

I. To conſider what is meant by *ſeeking our own Things.*

II. What by *ſeeking the Things of Jeſus Chriſt.*

III. To explain and prove the Aſſertion, that *all ſeek* the former, *not* the latter.

IV. To ſhew what we are to learn from it.

I. *Seeking our own Things*, is purſuing our own Inclinations and Fancies, or imagined worldly Intereſts. And many ſtrange Fancies People of all Ranks indulge. Some never aſk themſelves, whether the Courſe which they are taking is likely to be for their Good: others never

never ſlacken it, though from Time to Time they ſtrongly ſuſpect it is not. Often they adopt, without Examination, the Opinions of thoſe about them, whom yet they are far from eſteeming: and either will not ſee, that better Judges think differently; or do ſee it, and will not regard it, but follow Cuſtom blindfold, even againſt their own Liking. Or it may be, they think a little, but think ſhort; neither to the End, nor to any conſiderable Part, even of the preſent Life: imagine what pleaſes now, muſt always pleaſe; and what brings no Inconvenience yet, will never bring any. Indeed, uſually, it is their principal Point, to acquire the Things which others wiſh for, though viſibly of no real Uſe; and they are vehement for whatever will make them envied as happy Perſons, though it produce little elſe than Vexation and Guilt. Some will not truſt even their own Experience againſt their Prepoſſeſſions: but force themſelves to believe, that the Lives which they lead muſt needs be delightful, though they feel the contrary. Many loſe the Opportunities, and even the Reliſh, of moderate and rational Pleaſures, by a wild Purſuit of viſionary and extravagant ones. Nay, there are ſome

who

who not only follow wrong Ways, but, as the Text hath it, *seek* them: go purposely out of the plain Road, as it were, in Search of Misery. It were much to be wished, that all these were more studious of their Interest, even their temporal Interest, than they are: it might be one Step towards becoming what they ought. But still the most faithful and assiduous Worshippers of the World's great Idols, Applause, Advancement, Profit, Power, entirely mistake, if they hope that any of these Things will either secure them lasting Enjoyment, or preserve them from acute Misery. A little Reflexion discovers, that Happiness consists in somewhat stable and inward: whence the more thoughtful have learned to seek it in themselves. But, alas! when we inspect ourselves, what a Mixture do we find, of Ignorance which we cannot enlighten, of Weakness which we cannot strengthen, of Wrongness which we cannot set right! Besides that all Creatures, as such, are essentially insufficient for their own Happiness; there is by Nature a Void within us, which must be filled from above, or we must remain for ever craving and unsatisfied. Let us therefore look upwards, and consider,

II. *The*

II. *The Things which are Jesus Christ's:* the Benefits that he hath procured for us, with the Knowledge of them that he hath communicated to us. And indeed what have we of Value, that is not his? Some have pretended they could investigate all the Doctrines, the Duties, the Rewards of Religion completely by their own Reason, and form themselves to a suitable Disposition by their own Strength. But the History of Heathenism clearly shews, that no one ever did this; nor probably therefore ever would. The one true God was scarce known. False Deities of the worst Characters were adored, instead of him, with Rites that seldom, if ever, mended their Votaries, often corrupted them. The common Rules of social Life were by no Means throughly understood; as the shocking Custom of exposing Children to perish, the barbarous Combats of Gladiators, the promiscuous and unnatural Practices of Lewdness, publickly allowed, give dreadful Proofs. But the internal Virtues of the Heart were still less regarded; and they who seemed possessed of them, ascribed the Merit wholly to themselves: very few said so much as the Pharisee, *God, I thank thee, that I am not as other Men are:* scarce any with the Publican, *God be*

be merciful to me, a Sinner[a]. Yet how continually are the beſt of Men guilty of Faults! But they had hardly any Notion of the univerſal Need of Repentance, or any Name for Humility of Soul. Forgiveneſs of Injuries was very unſteadily taught: Benevolence to Enemies lay yet farther out of Sight. Courage injuriouſly exerciſed, Patriotiſm ſhewn by invading the Rights of their Neighbours, and Numbers of other ſplendid Sins, paſſed for heroic Excellencies. There was very little Hope of future Bliſs to give Men Spirit in doing what was right, and leſs Fear of future Judgment to deter them from what was wrong. Such were the beſt inſtructed Nations: and ſuch, or worſe, had we been probably now, but for the Compaſſion of Jeſus Chriſt. Indeed without him we ſhould never have known, till too late, how bad our Condition was. The real State of Mankind, with reſpect to God, was, in a great Meaſure, unknown to them, till he underwent what he did, at once to lay open to us our Danger, and to free us from it on moſt equitable Terms. Even the myſterious Parts of what he taught for this Purpoſe lead us to reverence the Divine Wiſdom, and think modeſtly of our own; while the more

[a] Luke xviii. 11, 13.

distinctly intelligible direct us to every Thing that is right and fit.

The Gospel hath laid the Foundation of our Duty in that pleasing and thankful Veneration of God, which his creating Bounty, his providential Care, his redeeming Mercy, excite: and which tends to inspire us, with a deep Concern for whatever we have done offensive to him, an earnest Desire of obeying his Commands, an humble Sense that we need his Assistance, a firm Persuasion that he will grant it to us, a cheerful Reliance on him for every Thing that we want, in Regard to this World or the next. This excellent Frame of Mind must powerfully suppress irregular Appetites of Sense, immoderate Desires of Wealth, vain Fondness for Pomp and Pre-eminence, anxious Cares about worldly Events. And on such Love of God Christianity builds its second great Commandment, Love of our Neighbour: a Duty, enjoined in a higher Degree, and carried to a greater Extent, though still a reasonable one, in Scripture, than in any other Institution of Religion. It prescribes the most accurate and tender Attention to the Obligations which result from the nearer Connections in Life, the most industrious Endeavours to be useful in whatever Station we fill, the most affectionate

Faith-

Faithfulneſs to the Community of which we are Members, tempered with univerſal Good-will to the reſt of Mankind: benevolent Reſpect towards thoſe who excel us; Readineſs to pardon, as far as can be ſafe, all who have wronged us; Eſteem of whatever in any Perſon deſerves it; ſincerely kind Wiſhes to thoſe whom we eſteem the leaſt; Compaſſion for the Wretched, and Relief to our utmoſt Ability, though we ſtraiten ourſelves. Nor doth our bleſſed Redeemer expect us only to pity, as he did, the temporal Wants of Men; but, as he did alſo, their ſpiritual ones unſpeakably more; a Precept peculiar to the Goſpel, and comprehending a great Variety of important Particulars: Proviſion for inſtructing the young and ignorant; and combining afterwards pious Advice with outward Relief to the ſick and needy; ſeaſonable Warnings, and mild Reproof, when there is Hope of their being regarded; conſtant Circumſpection to ſet a prudent, as well as innocent Example; that we lead not others into Danger, by what, perhaps, we can do ourſelves with Safety; but ſubmit to conſiderable Reſtraints, rather than let *our Liberty*, as the Apoſtle expreſſes it, *become a Stumbling Block to them that are weak*[b]: Studying to

[b] 1 Cor. viii. 9.

obſerve theſe Rules, for they require and merit Study, is *ſeeking the Things that are Jeſus Chriſt's*. And they are oppoſed to our own, not as being really contrary even to our preſent Intereſt: very far from it. Only through the inbred Diſorder of our Hearts, and the general Prevalence of evil Habits, we are apt to delight in very oppoſite Diſpoſitions: and hence a good Life comes to be a ſelf-denying one, which elſe would be the conſtant Practice of Self-love. The ambitious would *ſeek the* true *Honour that cometh from God*[c]; the ſelfiſh would *have Reſpect to the* heavenly *Recompence of Reward*[d]; the Lovers of Pleaſure would ſecure *the Fulneſs of Joy* which is *for evermore*[e]: and the Means of being happy here and hereafter would evidently appear to be the ſame. But now the Difficulties of performing our Duty are ſo great, and our Failures in it ſo many, that, amongſt *the Things that are Jeſus Chriſt's*, we muſt ſeek with peculiar Earneſtneſs his Grace to ſtrengthen us, and an Intereſt in his Merits to procure us Acceptance, which thus the weakeſt and worſt of us all may be ſure of obtaining.

Yet, great as theſe Bleſſings are, the Apoſtle hath ſaid, that *all Men ſeek their own, not the Things of Jeſus Chriſt*. Let us therefore

[c] John v. 44. [d] Heb. xi. 26. [e] Pſal. xv. 12.

III. Exa-

III. Examine into the Meaning and the Truth of this melancholy Aſſertion.

It is plainly not to be taken in the utmoſt Extent. For he had given the contrary Character of *Timothy* juſt before, as he hath of others elſewhere. But he may well be underſtood to ſay, that all abſolutely have ſome Share of Blame in this Reſpect: and the Generality, which in common Speech the Word *all* frequently ſignifies, are highly and dangerouſly blameable. For who can deny this to be Fact? Many are vicious in every Way that Inclination prompts them to. Many, who regard ſome Parts of Virtue, diſregard others, perhaps avowedly. The more uniformly regular would do well to aſk themſelves, Whether it is from a real inward Senſe of Duty, or for the Sake of Reputation or Convenience? They who make a Conſcience of behaving right in common Life, do they make any of paying due Honour to God? Our ſtrongeſt Obligations of every Kind are to him: yet Numbers think highly of their own Merit, while they neglect him; and, it may be, pique themſelves on neglecting him. If we profeſs ourſelves Believers in him, do we ſtatedly and fervently pray to him, and give him Thanks for his daily Bleſſings? Do we live

in his Fear and Love, and the Hope of his future Mercy? Supposing we sincerely embrace natural Religion; have we carefully inquired into the Truth of Christianity; unprejudiced by Attachment to forbidden Pleasures, by the vain Fancy, that nothing can be true which we comprehend not fully, by ludicrous or sophistical Misrepresentations? And, to guard us against these, have we consulted proper Books and Persons? If we call ourselves Christians, do we observe conscientiously all the Institutions of Christianity; or slight them when any Trifle intervenes: and do we observe them otherwise than as mere Forms? Do we use them to impress on our Souls the Importance of the Doctrines, the Pardon, the Grace, the Rewards of the Gospel? And do we employ our Faith of all these Things to improve us in every Part of a Christian Temper? This Temper, and our Inclinations, too often interfere. Which do we prefer? And where do we lay the Foundation of our Conduct? We ought not to lay it in Attention to our own Interests or Amusements, joining now and then with them a little Appearance, or perhaps a little Reality, of Religion, provided we can make it agree with them. But the Rule is, *seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his*

his Righteousness[f]. The Ground-work of every Thing good, is a devout Resolution to do our whole Duty. Each is to do it suitably to his own Station: but all, in whatever Station, high or low, are to make it their inviolable Concern: for God *hath given no Man Licence to Sin*[g]. Whoever doth not feel this Truth, as the most important one that belongs to his Existence; and govern his Conduct by it, in trying as well as ordinary Cases, hath not *sought the Things of Jesus Christ* in a due Manner. And think then, I entreat you, how few have. A sad Reflexion! but we must remind our Hearers to make it. Else how much pleasanter would it be to congratulate the good on their happy State, than to terrify the wicked; to encourage the modest and timorous, than to confute the presumptuous, and alarm the thoughtless!

But, such being the Condition of the World, let us now consider,

IV. What we are to learn from it.

And certainly we ought to learn great Mildness towards others, who are faulty; since, more or less, all are so. Even the first Christians, even the first of the Christian Clergy, for of these, it must be owned, the Apostle peculiarly

[f] Matth. vi. 33. [g] Ecclus xv. 20.

ſpeaks in the Text, fell very ſhort of Perfection. And ever ſince, the beſt have had their Defects, and the worſt their good Qualities. Let us therefore think and hope, as well as with any Reaſon we can, of all. Yet ſtill, they who abandon themſelves to Wickedneſs, and eſpecially they who labour to pervert others, either in Principles or Practice, and to make a bad World worſe, be they ever ſo agreeable, be they ever ſo uſeful to us, are to be avoided, and checked with more Care, the more Danger there is of their doing Harm. That we are unable, from various Circumſtances, to exert this right Spirit, may ſometimes, perhaps often, be a juſt Plea: but ought never to be made a falſe Pretence. The firm Purpoſe of doing it ſhould always be kept in Mind, and executed as ſoon as poſſible, with Amends for the Delay. At the ſame Time, in Proportion as the bad give real Marks of Reformation, they ſhould be diligently encouraged, yet with prudent, and cautious, and gradual Kindneſs. But above all, the honeſt, the virtuous, the conſcientious, the pious, ought to be countenanced, brought forward, and cheriſhed, as *the Salt and the Light of the Earth*[h], who preſerve Society from Corruption

[h] Matth. v. 13, 14.

ruption

ruption and Diſſolution, who ſhew Men the Way to preſent and future Happineſs. Nor ſhould they be rejected or deſpiſed, though ſometimes inferior in Qualifications of leſs Moment, nay, though, in ſome Reſpects, hurting, through Miſtake, their own good Cauſe: of which, however, it is very unjuſt, though very uſual, to condemn or ſuſpect them, without or beyond Reaſon.

But the principal Point is, what we are to learn in Regard more immediately to ourſelves. If the World be ſo bad, there is great Need to aſk our Hearts, what are we who make a Part of it? Conforming to it implicitly is by no Means the Rule either of Scripture or of Reaſon: yet is it not too much our Practice? A little honeſt Home Inquiry would ſoon furniſh the true Anſwer. But we turn our Eyes from what we have no Mind to diſcern, and try to deceive not only others, but ourſelves. Yet to what End? God knows the Truth. Men will know it, if they do not; and Angels too. We ourſelves know it in Part all the while; and ſhall know and lament it to Eternity, if we refuſe to take the proper Notice of it in Time.

Examine therefore what the Tenour of your Conduct is. If it be diſſolute or intemperate, the

the Necessity of amending it is glaringly visible. If, though otherwise innocent, you consume your Days chiefly in Trifles; such Waste of precious Time, given for other Ends, is highly criminal. Besides that, both the supinely indolent, and the busier Votaries of idle Amusements, expose themselves to various Temptations, and set a dangerous Example to those around them: the Tendency of which, as it spreads, must be, to make Persons of all Ranks, even the most important, and, by Consequence, the Community composed of them, insignificant, contemptible, and vicious. Further still: though your Disposition be to Things of more Use, and so far commendable, yet if on any Occasion you indulge either Resentment or Malevolence, however calm, towards any of your Fellow-creatures; if you are injurious or hard-hearted, from Selfishness; or but thoughtlessly inattentive to the Rights, the Interests, the Wants, the Feelings, of those whom you ought to regard, you may thus have contracted, in many Ways, most heinous Degrees of Guilt. Nay, supposing you have been, and are, beneficent as well as harmless, but less so than you might; even this Defect is a Failure of Duty. Not that you are to give Way to Scruples; there is no End of them:

but

but to consider maturely, and consult worthy Friends; what you can add to the Good which you do already. Possibly it may be more than you imagine. Be it ever so little, do it but according to the best of your Judgment, and God will accept it. But, at the same Time, be sure to remember, that the rightest Demeanor in worldly Matters will not suffice; but our chief Regard must be to him who made us, and whose therefore we are. From his Goodness all that we enjoy proceeds: from his Authority over us all our Duties flow: and those, which are owing immediately to himself, surely require our principal Care. But such Duties as natural Reason teaches, are far from being the only Concern of those to whom he hath prescribed additional ones, founded on the important Alterations which our primitive State, as we learn from Scripture, hath undergone. Man is a fallen Creature: *We are dead*, as the Apostle strongly expresses it, *and our Life is hid with Christ in God*[i]. Our Hope of future Happiness lies not in ourselves, but is reposited in the Hands of the blessed *Jesus*, who purchased it with his Blood: and *where our Treasure is, there must our Hearts be also*[k]. Without affec-

[i] Col. iii. 3. [k] Matth. vi. 21. Luke xii. 34.

tionate

tionate and habitual Movements of the Soul towards the Father of Mercy, the Author of Salvation, the Inſpirer of Holineſs; without a deep Senſe of paſt Guilt and preſent Imperfection, an humble Faith in the Merits of our glorified Redeemer, and a firm Reliance on the Grace of the Divine Comforter, all our Virtue, all our Piety, will avail us nothing. For, when we have done our beſt, *we are* but *unprofitable Servants*[1].

You will object, perhaps, that indulging Contemplations of this Nature would engroſs our whole Thoughts and Time: the Affairs of common Life muſt be utterly neglected for them. But are you indeed at all near the Borders of that Danger? Or do not ſuch Objectors take thorough Care to keep far enough out of the Reach of it? You are by no Means called only to Acts of Devotion, or only to the more ſublime of moral Duties. Prudent and moderate Concern for our worldly Intereſt is a Duty. Every Propriety and Decency of Life is a Duty. Even ornamental Accompliſhments have their Value. But from theſe Conceſſions Men conclude, that they may ſafely pay their main Attention to what deſerves but the ſmalleſt Part;

[1] Luke xvii. 10.

and imagine they are abundantly good Chriſtians, almoſt without any one peculiarly Chriſtian Action or Sentiment. At beſt, a few pious Formalities, practiſed now and then, conſtitute their whole Religion: and the reſt of their Life, and all their Heart, is given up to what hath no Tincture of Religion in it: whereas inward Reverence of God, as he is manifeſted to us in the Goſpel of *Jeſus Chriſt*, ought to be our ruling Principle; and extend its Influence throughout each Article, of our Buſineſs, our Converſation, our private Thoughts.

Perhaps you will object again, that ſo very ſerious a Turn of Mind as this, will caſt a Gloom over every Thing: and one muſt have ſome Pleaſure ſurely. But learn to be pleaſed with what you ought: and you will have inexpreſſibly more Pleaſure than you poſſibly can elſe. In other Things you take Pains, no ſmall Pains, to acquire a Taſte; often, for what is of no Value; ſometimes, for what is bad: and perhaps, after all, can ſucceed no further, than to put on the Affectation of liking what you really do not, or get by Habit a wretched Craving for Gratifications, which you cannot but deſpiſe and condemn. Employ yourſelves better. Eſteem what is eſtimable, and it will exalt in-

ſtead

ſtead of debaſing you: love what is amiable, and it will reward your Affection. *Love him* above all, who hath *firſt loved you*[m]; and his Service will be delightful: become ſuch as he requires, and you will find Satisfaction in every Thing. It is a ſtrange Miſtake, to imagine the Burthens of Religion inſupportable; while we take much heavier upon ourſelves from Fancy and Faſhion. Were the Goſpel to enjoin the Fatigues, the Expences, the Dangers, which on Reflexion we ſhall perceive Caprice and Cuſtom do, that one Argument againſt it would be accounted deciſive.

The moſt ſerious Perſon in the World may juſtly be alſo the cheerfulleſt. Even Penitents, in the Midſt of their Sorrow, at the very Beginning of their Amendment, enjoy a bleſſed Hope of Forgiveneſs and Acceptance, infinitely preferable to the higheſt Pleaſures of Sin. But Perſons of confirmed Goodneſs have a *Peace* within their Breaſts, *which paſſeth all Underſtanding*[n] of thoſe who have not experienced it, and all Deſcription of thoſe who have. They feel no tormenting Remorſe, no diſquieting Dread of God or Man. They are never agitated by Malice or Envy: ſeldom, and but

[m] 1 John iv. 19. [n] Phil. iv. 7.

gently,

gently, moved by Anger. Pity indeed they often experience; but gratifying it comforts both others and themſelves. Their Behaviour is friendly, and therefore agreeable: their Diſcourſe lively, if Nature hath qualified them for it; but at leaſt inoffenſive and conciliating. Their Hearts are open, in a proper Degree, to all the innocent Amuſements of Life, and they long for none of the prohibited ones. Virtuous Diſcretion preſerves their Health and Spirits as much as worldly Uncertainties permit, makes their Circumſtances eaſy, their Families and Dependants orderly and happy. Their judicious Beneficence is very uſeful, their blameleſs Example yet more. Thus they become Bleſſings within the Compaſs of their Sphere: and ſurely reap no little Joy from the Eſteem of others, but unſpeakably more from the Teſtimony of their own Conſciences. The beſt of them indeed are ſenſible of many Failings: but all conſiſtent with that Sincerity, which God, they know, will recompence. They ſee through the whole Courſe of Life, that they are in the only right Way; and whatever may happen to them, all will end well. Diſappointments, Unkindneſs, Ingratitude, Loſſes of Friends or of Fortune, Neceſſity, Pain, Sickneſs, and Death, *work together*

gether for their Good[a], and unite to form an infallible Plan for increasing their final Felicity. Never will Society grow gloomy, but inexpressibly the cheerfuller, for being composed of such Persons as these: and such ought the religious naturally to be.

Therefore you, who are truly religious, appear in Character, and do Credit to your Cause. Despise with Good-humour and pity the impotent Ridicule of the inconsiderate: let the World see that you are happy, and that your Belief in God is the Ground of it. Wear no dejected Looks, put on no forbidding Appearances; be affable, be courteous, be joyful. Avoid improper Amusements; guard against Fondness for those in which occasionally you may do well to join: but express a decent and modest, a mild and compassionate, not an angry or censorious, Disapprobation of the common Excesses in them; shew that you can relish Life perfectly well without them, by engaging with Alacrity in the proper Business of your Station, improving yourselves, and doing Good to others. Never unseasonably magnify in Talk, but assiduously demonstrate in Fact, the Comfort you have in observing the Precepts and

[a] Rom. viii. 28.

expecting

expecting the Rewards of the Gospel. Manifest, whenever Opportunities present themselves, yet without any Ostentation, the benevolent Serenity which Christian Faith inspires, your Enjoyment both of Conversation and Solitude in their Seasons, your Composure under Doubts and Uncertainties, your Fortitude under Crosses and Afflictions, and your settled Persuasion, that you shall ever be enabled to *possess your Soul in Gladness of Heart*[p], and *rejoice in the Lord alway*[q].

Such Behaviour will surely convince even the vicious and the prejudiced, if they have any Reflexion, that to seek their own Advantage with Success, they must *seek the Things which are Jesus Christ's*. And if they ever intend it, the present Time is always the best: but this present Time is peculiarly so. Decency prohibits now the usual Diversions: apply your vacant Hours to a better Purpose. The Offices of the Week throughout express in the most affecting Manner, what your gracious Redeemer hath done and suffered for you: think deliberately in it, what you ought to do for him, indeed for yourselves. Think what you have been, and are, and what the

[p] Luke xxi. 19. Acts ii. 46. [q] Phil. iv. 4.

Faith you profeſs requires you to be: conſider what fatal Conſequences will follow, perhaps very ſoon, if you neglect to amend, and how you ſhall accompliſh this neceſſary Work. Read with Reverence the Rules and Declarations of God's Word; read with Attention other awakening, yet prudent Books, reflecting as you go along; and engage ſome pious, but judicious Friend, to excite, ſupport, direct, and, if there be Occaſion, reſtrain you. Form diſcreetly by their Helps needful Reſolutions; and beg earneſtly of God Strength to fulfil them: elſe they will all prove ineffectual. But remember, that the Piety of the Week, however ſtrict, is not to end with it; and cannot be really Chriſtian, if it doth. You are called to Recollection now, that you may practiſe Vigilance all the reſt of your Days. Temporary, periodical *Goodneſs*, that *is like the Morning Cloud, and as the early Dew goeth away*[r], will be of no Avail to any one; but they, *who, by patient Continuance in well-doing, ſeek for Glory and Honour and Immortality*, are ſecure of obtaining *eternal Life*[s].

[r] Hoſ. vi. 4. [s] Rom. ii. 7.

SER-

SERMON VII.

GAL. vi. 14.

But God forbid that I ſhould glory, ſave in the Croſs of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt: by whom the World is crucified unto me, and I unto the World.

WE muſt have ſome Foundation, real or imagined, for thinking well of ourſelves and our Condition; or we muſt be wretched. And innumerable are the Methods which Men take to procure the Eſteem of their own Minds. Too many *glory in their Shame*[a]: are proud of Notions and Diſcourſes, which miſrepreſent ſacred Truths, degrade human Nature, and tend to diſſolve human Society; of gratifying their Paſſions, their Appetites, their Fancies, whatever Miſchiefs it produces; of doing what viſibly hurts, and muſt finally ruin, their Characters, their Fortunes, their Healths, their Souls. Others value themſelves on more plauſible, yet inſufficient, Pretenſions: on the Luſtre of an ancient Fa-

[a] Phil. iii. 19.

mily, which perhaps they diſgrace; on the Inheritance or Acquiſition of Wealth, which they employ to little or no good Purpoſe; on Agreeableneſs of Perſon, which makes them vain and imprudent the ſhort Time it continues, and miſerable when it decays; on Livelineſs of Wit, which either provokes Enemies, or invites dangerous Friends; on Depth of Knowledge, often falſely ſo called and pernicious, often wholly foreign to their true Buſineſs; on Elegance of Taſte in ſmaller Matters, while they are contemptibly injudicious in the greateſt; on Pomp and Shew, which give a Pleaſure as fleeting as it is childiſh; on making a Figure in the idle Hurry of Amuſements, which encroaches on every valuable Purpoſe of Life, and wears out the Spirits under Pretence of raiſing them; on the Favour of the Great, by whatever Arts attained, and however precarious; or on the ſeemingly more ſolid Poſſeſſion of Power, which it is hard to abſtain from uſing ill, and extremely hard to uſe in a due Meaſure well; which diſobliges by the Exercise of it many more than it can poſſibly oblige; is accompanied with perpetual Fatigue and Uneaſineſs, yet with perpetual Envy; cauſes innumerable Vexations while

while it laſts; and yet commonly grievous Regret when it is gone.

If all theſe be wrong Grounds of Self-complacency, how few of us have right ones! There are thoſe, however, who profeſs to build it on ſomething more ſubſtantial, on Virtue. But, alas! the Virtue of great Numbers conſiſts almoſt wholly in ſpecious Words, Honour, Benevolence, Good-nature, which are either a mere Ornament of their Talk, or influence their Behaviour only on ſome Occaſions, or to ſome Perſons. And the more uniformly well inclined towards others are often ſtrangely addicted to blamable Indulgence of themſelves: or, however inoffenſive otherwiſe, are lamentably defective in the Diſcipline of the Heart, particularly in forming it to that deep Humility, which becomes Duſt and Aſhes. If we think too highly of ourſelves, we ſhall be fatally miſled: and, if we think reaſonably, we ſhall experience the daily Mortification of being faulty, more or leſs, even in thoſe Things for which we are applauded. Beſides, our Virtue itſelf will frequently oblige us to do what others will diſlike, oppoſe, revenge. Or, though we eſcape ſuch Evils, yet the unavoidable ones of Fear, Sorrow, Languor, Pain, Sick-

 neſs,

nefs, Death, are ufually more than enough to make our prefent State a pitiable, rather than a glorious one, if the Confcioufnefs of our own Rectitude be our whole Support under them.

Wifer Men, therefore, in their Search of Comfort, look beyond themfelves to God. And, indeed, Faith in him, provided it reprefents him as a righteous Governor, obferving, diftinguifhing, and recompenfing, unfpeakably dignifies our Condition, and adds Importance to our Profpects. But ftill, our beft Obedience being only his Due, and paid only out of what we have received from him, we could neither boaft nor merit, though it were perfect: and what his free Goodnefs would beftow on us even then, beyond Security from being Sufferers on the Whole, Reafon could never afcertain.

Or, were the Innocent affured by it of ever fo great Rewards; are we innocent? Thoughtlefs Prefumption may anfwer haftily in the Affirmative: but what doth the deliberate Voice of Confcience fay, after a faithful Scrutiny of our paft Actions, Words and Thoughts, as in the Divine Prefence? Such and fo many as our Duties are, of Love, Reverence, and Refignation to our Maker, of Juftice, Equity, Goodnefs, in the numerous Relations of Life,

virtuous

virtuous Command of our various Inclinations, careful Uſe and upright Government of our Underſtandings; have we been always as blameleſs in each of them, as infinite Purity can demand of us, though we ſee that no one round us hath? If not, let us remember it, we are Sinners, and Sin deſerves Puniſhment. *God forbid* then *that we ſhould glory in* our moral or religious Characters: God grant we may find Mercy for our Failures in them.

But how can Reaſon aſſure us that we ſhall? Doth it know, what the Holineſs of his Nature, the Honour of his Government, the Admonition of other Parts of his Creation, may render needful? Sorrow for what is paſt cannot annihilate it: and living well for the Time to come, though it were not mixed, as what we call ſo is, with perpetual Faults, no more makes Amends for paſt Tranſgreſſions, than avoiding to incur new Debts pays off the old. Still our Hearts dictate Hope. But Hope, far from being Certainty, is not ſo much as Perſuaſion. And though Pardon were unqueſtionable, future Happineſs, much leſs eternal, would not. The Poſſibilities therefore, the Probabilities of theſe Things, which Nature can ſuggeſt, how reviving ſoever, compared with abſolute De-

spondency, *have* to Christians, as the Apostle speaks in a similar Case, *no Glory by Reason of the Glory that excelleth*[b]*:* they fade away and vanish before his *precious Promises*[c], who *was delivered for our Offences, and raised again for our Justification*[d].

Here then we have sure Ground for glorying: not in ourselves indeed; for we have contributed nothing to this merciful Dispensation, besides falling into the extremest Need of it by our Offences: but *Christ Jesus is made unto us of God, Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption, that, as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*[e]. We have only to embrace, with acknowledged Unworthiness, the gracious Offer of our heavenly Father, on the equitable Conditions annexed to it.

But we must embrace the Whole, not Part only. Multitudes profess to respect the Gospel very highly, for its many rational Doctrines, its holy and mild Precepts, its interesting Sanctions, its Provision for instructing Mankind, the good Example of its Publisher, its Declarations of Forgiveness, nay perhaps also for its Assu-

[b] 2 Cor. iii. 10. [c] 2 Pet. i. 4. [d] Rom. iv. 25.
[e] 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

ances of inward Aſſiſtance. But of the Efficacy of what our Redeemer underwent to procure theſe Benefits, they entertain the loweſt Conceptions: raiſe Difficulties on every Article of *the great Myſtery of Godlineſs*[f], and explain away the Scripture Doctrine of it into Nothing: ſtrive to form a Chriſtianity as much as poſſible without Chriſt, and be ſaved, if not by their own Merits, however not by his. Therefore the Apoſtle in the Text lays the Streſs where it really lies: *God forbid, that I ſhould glory* in any thing, *ſave in the* CROSS *of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt:* in his Submiſſion to die upon it, not merely as a Confirmation of his Sincerity, which puts his and his Apoſtles Martyrdoms almoſt on a Level, but as a propitiatory Offering, by *which*, to ſpeak the Language of holy Writ, *he hath reconciled us to God, making Peace by the Blood of his Croſs, in the Body of his Fleſh through Death*[g]. That he appeared on Earth to eſtabliſh true Religion there, bore the Inconveniences of this mortal State, *endured the Contradiction of* Sinners[h], and yielded up his Life to their Malice, is the univerſal Belief of all Chriſtians; and why might not God, foreſeeing

[f] 1 Tim. iii. 16. [g] Col. i. 20, 21, 22.
[h] Heb. xii. 23.

theſe

these Things from Eternity, graciously accept his condescending to them for our Sakes, though otherwise wholly foreign to a Nature united to the Divine, as a Sacrifice offered on our Behalf to infinite Justice: bestowing on the Priest and Victim the most acceptable Retribution that he could possibly receive, the Right of pardoning, reforming, and making eternally happy, as many as should throw themselves on the Mercy thus tendered them, and prove the Sincerity of their thankful Faith, by that of their Obedience? We are far from pretending to know all the Reasons of a Transaction, *into which* even *Angels desire to look*[i]: yet surely considerate Minds may trace in it evident Footsteps of Holiness, Goodness, Wisdom: but at least humble Hearts will recollect, that *the* imagined *Foolishness of God is wiser than Men*[k]; and finding, as every one living must on due Search, that they have no Cause to glory in themselves, will *glory* most cordially *in the Cross of Jesus Christ*: ascribing to his Intercession their Forgiveness, to his Strength their good Actions, to his Merits their Reward. *Not by Works of Righteousness, which we have done, but according to his Mercy, God*

[i] 1 Pet. i. 12. [k] 1 Cor. i. 25.

saveth

saveth us, by the washing of Regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he sheds on us abundantly through Christ Jesus our Saviour, that being justified by his Grace, we should be made Heirs of eternal Life[l]. *Blessing, and Honour, and Glory, and Power, be unto him that sitteth upon the Throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever*[m].

But then we cannot be intitled to such Exultation, unless we are qualified as the latter Part of the Text intimates. *Faith* indeed *saveth us*[n]: but that alone *which worketh by Love*[o], to God, to our Fellow-creatures, to every Thing good: which cannot consist with a ruling Love to the Ways of an evil World. Therefore St. *John* saith, *If any Man love the World*, that is, preferably, *the Love of the Father*[p] *is not in him*; and St. *Paul* only expresses the same Meaning a little more strongly, when he reminds us by his own Example, that *we* must *be crucified*, dead *to the World, and it to us*[q]: we must sacrifice all inordinate Fondness for it to him, who sacrificed himself on the Cross for our Salvation; and mortally hate whatever is wrong in it, at the risque of being mortally hated by it. Still

[l] Tit. iii. 5, 6, 7. [m] Rev. v. 13. [n] Eph. ii. 8.
[o] Gal. v. 6. [p] 1 John ii. 15. [q] Gal. vi. 14.

the

the Comforts of Life, which God hath provided for us, are to be enjoyed with duly proportioned Gladneſs and Thankfulneſs: the Subordinations of Life are to be maintained, the common Buſineſs of it followed, the Proprieties and Civilities of it preſerved, and perverſe Non-compliances diligently avoided. But, when all this is done, much will remain to be renounced and *crucified*. For, as St. *John* hath admoniſhed us, *we are of God, and the whole World*, even what calls itſelf the Chriſtian World, *lieth in Wickedneſs*[1]: powerfully encouraging every bad Thing, to which our Appetites and Paſſions prompt us, and many to which they do not.

Faſhion makes ſome Men Miſſionaries of Infidelity, objecting againſt Religion, even what they know to be falſe: others, implicit Believers in them, to ſhew their own Freedom of Thought; and a third Sort, utterly negligent of every Act of Piety, without ſo much as imagining they know why. Faſhionable Honour urges Men to Demands of Satisfaction, equally wicked and abſurd, often for no Injury at all. Faſhionable Diſcourſe abounds with Oaths and Imprecations, and irreverent Uſes of the moſt ſacred Names, not leſs fooliſh than profane; or, if clear of this Fault, commonly ſets the

[1] 1 John v. 19.

Whole

Whole of what we are concerned to believe and do, in a miſtaken Light. Faſhionable Extravagance conſumes in Gaming, and Luxury, and idle Expences, what ought to provide for our Families, for the worthy and the poor. Faſhionable Gratifications of the various Pleaſures of Senſe defeat the chief End of Man's Being. Even more innocent faſhionable Amuſements ſwallow up the precious Time, of which we ſhould be frugal for better Purpoſes. Faſhionable Hours interfere with the Order of Nature, with the public Worſhip of God, with the regular Diſpoſition of all Sorts of Affairs. And faſhionable Complaiſance places the vileſt of human Beings on the ſame footing with the moſt unexceptionable, to the dreadful Weakening of the eſſential Diſtinction between Good and Evil.

Yet in all theſe Matters Men will follow, with ſtrange inconſiderateneſs, even the profligate. But they conceive themſelves fully authorized to imitate, in every Thing, ſuch as common Speech calls decent and reputable: Titles, in ſome Ages, to be had exceeding cheap. In one Sex eſpecially, and the other is copying after it, very ſmall Remnants, even of moral Virtue, will ſuffice: and in the upper Part of both, yet leſs of Religion, if

any

any at all, is needful. Accordingly many, who, from Conſcience, preſerve ſome Forms of it, rather look deſirous to have them thought mere Forms, and are wonderfully ſhy of uttering a Word to ſhew the contrary: paſs off any Mention of their Regard to it as ſlightly as may be, and are content to let others treat it with as much Indignity as they will: inſtead of *glorying in the Croſs of Chriſt*, *aſhamed to confeſs him before Men*, though he hath paſſed on that Shame ſo awful a Sentence[s]; and perfectly indifferent whether Piety hath the Support, which they muſt know it wants, provided they can make an acceptable Figure to thoſe around them; a Point about which they are as ſolicitous, as if the Apoſtle had ſaid, *Be ye conformed to this World*, inſtead of, *Be ye not*[t]. Perhaps the more ſeriouſly educated ſcruple going at once the utmoſt Lengths of the Mode in wrong Things: but are gradually familiarized to follow their Leaders from one Step to another, till they advance imperceptibly to a frightful Diſtance from their firſt ſetting out; and it may be at laſt grow ambitious of being Leaders in their Turn of a little World of their own, that ſhall tempt the great one into ſtill worſe Enormities.

s Matth. x. 32, 33. Mark viii. 38. Luke ix. 26. xii. 8, 9.
t Rom. xii. 2.

Through

Through the Whole of this giddy Progreſs, innumerable Attentions, and incredibly earneſt ones, to moſt inſignificant Matters, fill their Hearts, and expell or deaden every devout and virtuous Feeling. If they find Leiſure to reflect on their Conduct, it is chiefly to invent Excuſes and Palliations: if they ſtill go to Church, it is without Deſire of improving there: nay, if they ſtill pray in private, which probably few of them continue long, it is little more than repeating thoughtleſsly a few good Words: and thus, by Degrees, they come to have no real Affection or Veneration for their Creator, their Redeemer, their Sanctifier, no penitent Senſe of their own Imperfections or Tranſgreſſions, no practical or ſteady Perſuaſion of future Recompences; but form their whole Manner of talking and judging, as if the preſent State were all: are extremely eager about their worldly Intereſts and Pleaſures, but equally unconcerned about the Rightneſs of their Diſpoſitions: will on no Account be abſent from a Meeting for Buſineſs which they have at Heart, or a gay Aſſembly to which they are invited, let their Health or what will ſuffer; but neglect the appointed Seaſons of Divine Worſhip, on the pooreſt Pretences,

Pretences, or without any: crowd Bufinefs, Journeys, Diverfions, into the moft facred Seafons, contrary to the excellent Ends of their Inftitution, contrary to all Law, and all Shame; but would think their Reputations undone by going to the Houfe of God at any unufual Time, or even making, with Seriousnefs, a momentary Acknowledgement to him over their daily Food: confult neither Scripture nor Reafon to difcover their Duty; but make the artfulleft Ufe of either, to fence againft what they are unwilling to own for fuch; or, if Need be, avowedly prefer the Opinion and Practice of the World to both; difdainful Rebels againft Heaven, but mean-fpirited Slaves to they fcarce know whom.

Yet moft of them tolerate, and perhaps approve, fome Appearances of Religion, efpecially in fome Perfons; but fufpect any great Reality of it, as a Degree of Madnefs: have the utmoft Terrors of feeing this poor Land over-run with Enthufiafm and Superftition; but not the fmalleft Dread of Profanenefs and Profligatenefs: are ftartled at any new Declarations of Authority againft either, but comforted by the Hope, that they will prove ineffectual, and all go on as it did: read almoft any Thing written

to

to depreciate Christianity and relax moral Virtue, but almost Nothing in Favour of them; are very cautious of meddling with Treatises of Piety, however judiciously composed, for Fear of turning their Heads, but devour ever so many idle and even lascivious Books, without the least Apprehension of corrupting their Hearts: allow themselves to be much more expensive in the vain-glorious Display of private Magnificence, or towards the Support of Entertainments called polite, though neither of good Tendency nor good Taste, than liberal to the truest Charities: or, how bountiful soever to the temporal Distresses of their Brethren, have no Compassion at all for their spiritual Wants: nay, perhaps, have made formal Resolutions of giving nothing to such and such pious Uses, against which it is grown customary to inveigh, and hear no Answer.

Yet many of them had originally no Relish for this Turn of thinking and acting: indeed still rather affect to seem, than really are, happy in it: nay, possibly feel tormenting Doubts from Time to Time, how it will end. But these they are taught to consider as mere Fits of Gloominess, which they must dissipate by every mirthful Avocation they can invent, and learn

 to

to despise themselves for ever having been in so strange a State of Mind, and so unsuitable to living in good Company. Or, if Reflexion will, notwithstanding, be troublesome, Arguments must be sought for to quiet it. And accordingly they do argue, that Mens Stations, Connexions, and Spirits require some Relaxation, and they must take such as they can get, amongst those with whom it is to be had. But are they grieved or rejoiced at this pleaded Obligation? Do they stop at the Quantity or the Kinds that are really needful, or go beyond them at Pleasure? Are they growing better or worse all the While? Are they setting good Examples or bad? Surely these are material Questions. Yet they make a Shift either to feel or to acknowledge nothing of their Force; but whatever they like to join in, peremptorily insist, that it is harmless, useful, necessary, just what they please: yet reserving a Liberty, when once it loses Credit, to censure it as absurd and wrong every Way, and be full as fond of something else, that deserves it as little, without confessing the least Inconstancy.

For, with the World on their Side, they come at Length, instead of apologizing for themselves, to assume a sovereign Authority over

others;

others; confute their Objections with barely a contemptuous Laugh or Look, or by fixing on them any Name in Vogue, that denotes Preciseness; attack and persecute the most silent Nonconformists to their Notion, and haughtily overbear all that stand in their Way. Such as worship the same Idol with them, be their Characters ever so doubtful, must not be suspected; be they ever so notoriously criminal, must not be condemned; or counted unfit for their familiar Acquaintance, or even particular Friendship, let the Consequences, private or public, be what they may. The pert Ridiculers of Religion and Virtue are to be allowed abundance of Wit in the silliest and grossest Things they utter: and the most hard-hearted Libertines must be held to have true Good-nature, because they have superficial Gaiety. If they ruin themselves by their Vices, they are only to be pitied: if others also, they are to be excused to the very utmost, it is well if not looked on as the more considerable. But Men who have always been regularly virtuous are to be regarded as Objects of Derision. And such as add to their Virtue inward Religion, regulate their Conduct by it, abstain from Things on Account of it, appear to take Pleasure in its Doctrines, its Ordinances, its Pro-

miſes, and give any Tokens of what the Text calls *glorying in the Croſs of Chriſt*, they are to hope from this Quarter for a very ſmall Share of the charitable Candour, which is laviſhed ſo profuſely on others. Their Sincerity, or their Underſtanding, is to be ſtrongly queſtioned: their good Diſpoſitions and Actions denied, or paſſed over in Silence, or ſcornfully undervalued: ridiculous and dangerous Singularities to be imputed to them, on the weakeſt Evidence, or none; and if ever they fall into any ſuch, they are to be aggravated beyond Truth or Credibility; and no Plea whatever to be admitted in their Favour. So very far are too many from anſwering the Pſalmiſt's Deſcription of the Man *who ſhall dwell in God's holy Hill*, that *in his Eyes a vile Perſon is contemned, but he honoureth them that fear the Lord*[u].

Even an Infidel, were he to ſpeak honeſtly, would tell ſuch, that they are no Chriſtians. Yet, perhaps, they would be very angry with any one but an Infidel for ſaying ſo, and in Reality are by no Means Unbelievers. But why then will they not become conſiſtent? If the Goſpel of Chriſt deſerves any Regard at all, it deſerves a thorough Regard: either it

[u] Pſ. xv. 1. 4.

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is Nothing, or it is the most important of all Things. And they who profess it, yet seldom think of it, who are influenced by it, if at all, to scarce more than a little outward Shew, and slight and scorn the Frame of Mind which it was intended to create in them, *better had it been for them*, unless they amend, *never to have known it*[u]. All Sorts of Persons are concerned beyond Expression to recollect this often: but two Sorts beyond the rest. If you of the upper Part of the World, who have most to be thankful and most to be answerable for, instead of being exemplary in serving God, are remarkable for neglecting his Worship and his Laws; not only the Ingratitude, but the Perniciousness of your Behaviour, will greatly increase your Punishment. And if we of the Clergy, who teach others by our Exhortations to *set their Affection on Things above, not on Things on the Earth*[x], teach them the Reverse by our Practice: make it our Study to acquire Applause, or Wealth, or Power, or Rank, to partake of Amusements and Diversions in the poor low Degree that for Shame we can, or enjoy ourselves in some graver Kind of voluptuous Indolence; to do any thing, in short, but labour diligently in

[u] 2 Pet. ii. 21. [x] Col. iii. 2.

God's Vineyard from firſt to laſt for the Good of Souls; we ſhall receive a double Condemnation. And they who patronize any ſuch of us, will ſhare deeply in our Guilt.

It is not Rigour that dictates any of theſe Aſſertions to me. It was not Auſterity, but the tendereſt Compaſſion, that moved St. *Paul* to ſay, *For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the Enemies of the Croſs of Chriſt, who mind earthly Things*[x]: not always deſigned Enemies, but real ones however. Our Saviour hath told us, *He that is not with me, is againſt me*[y]. And they that will be with him to Effect, muſt be with him heartily, openly, and uniformly. We may have Qualities very amiable, and do Actions very laudable in the Eſtimation of Men, and yet our Hearts be far from *right in the Sight of God*[z]. He requires, as well he may, that we ſhould conſider ourſelves principally as his Creatures, as Sinners, as favoured with Offers of Mercy and of Grace, as bound to *live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly, looking for the bleſſed Hope of his glorious Appearance*[a]. However the Preference, which the World gives to very different

x Phil. iii. 18, 19. y Matth. xii. 30. Luke xi. 23.
z Acts viii. 21. a Tit. ii. 12, 13.

Matters,

Matters, may buoy us up now in overlooking these, it will be no Protection to us, when *the Dead, small and great, shall stand before God*[b]. And however insipid or insupportable a Life may appear to some, which is to be humbly spent in regulating their Desires, doing their Duty, and expecting their Reward; they will find upon Trial, that every other Scheme produces miserable Disappointments; and this, as much Happiness as our present State is capable of. Length of Days, easy Circumstances, general Esteem, domestic Tranquillity, national good Order and Strength, are the smaller Advantages that usually attend practising the Rules of Religion: but the constant ones, the calm Peace and joyful Prospects of all whose Minds are duly affected by the genuine Principles of it, these are Blessings inexpressibly great.

You are not exhorted to begin a new Course of Life, and retain your old Inclinations; making yourselves uneasy, without making yourselves better: but to acquire such Sentiments, that you may delight in all you do. The vigorous Exercise of good Sense will contribute not a little to this desirable End; for, indeed, the Ways of the World are often flat Contradictions to it.

[b] Rev. xx. 12.

But the fundamental Rule is, Learn a juſt Value for the Croſs of Chriſt, for the Pity he hath ſhewn, the Pardon he hath purchaſed, the Felicity he hath provided for you; and you will ſoon come to love the Reſtraints and Obſervances which he hath appointed, to look with Indifference, or ſometimes with Diſguſt and Abhorrence, on what you have hitherto admired, and find the Degree of your Satisfactions unſpeakably increaſed, by changing the Nature of them from trifling, diſgraceful, and noxious, to rational, noble and beneficent. Still Difficulties there will be, and to ſome Perſons peculiar ones, in breaking ſettled Habits, and diſſolving the Ties by which you have been long held. But God will give you both Courage and Prudence, to make it eaſier than you think. Though you will do what is right with Steadineſs, yet you will do it without Oſtentation, and with chearful Good-humour: ſpeak mildly of others, and keep on as good Terms with all Men as you ſafely can. But, if you are too ſolicitous to pleaſe them, you will gradually ſlide back, and forget, as Thouſands have done to their eternal Ruin, your former Convictions. Therefore, whenever you feel any, ſuffer them not to die away through Inattention,

tention, or be choaked by Cares and Pleaſures, or blaſted by the Breath of Scoffers: but impreſs them on your Souls immediately and frequently, form Reſolutions correſponding to them, and confirm theſe by reading good Books, by the Converſation and Countenance of good Perſons, by Attendance on God's public Ordinances; but eſpecially by fervent private Prayer, ſuited to your ſpiritual Condition. With this, *out of Weakneſs you will be made ſtrong*[c]: and without this, the ſeemingly firmeſt human Purpoſes, think as highly of them as you will, can never be effectual. *For God reſiſteth the proud, but giveth Grace to the humble*[d].

[c] Heb. xi. 34. [d] Jam. iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 5.

SERMON VIII.

COL. iii. 1, 2.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those Things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right Hand of God.

Set your Affection on Things above, not on Things on the Earth.

THIS Day we are met to celebrate the yearly Memorial of our blessed Lord's rising from the Dead. Now the genuine Method of paying Honour to every Article of our Creed is allowing it the proper Influence on our Hearts and Lives. Christ's Resurrection is vain with Respect to us, unless we be raised by it to the Faith of a better World; and the firmest Faith of that is vain also, unless it excite us to love and *seek the Things which are above*. This Passage of St. *Paul* therefore is justly made one principal Part of our *Easter Day's* Service: and the Degree of our practical Regard to it will be the true Measure of our Improve-

Improvement by the Discipline of the past Season, and of God's Acceptance of our Celebration of the present. That each of these then may be such, as we are concerned beyond Expression that it should, I shall lay before you the chief Motives to a due Regulation of our Desires and Behaviour, in Relation to earthly and heavenly Objects, which Motives arise from considering ourselves,

I. As rational Beings:

II. As Believers in God:

III. As Disciples of Christ: on which last Point I shall enlarge the most, as it deserves.

I. Let us consider ourselves merely as rational Beings, who are to live for a While on Earth; and suppose, that we had no farther Prospect. Then indeed we could not *set our Affections on Things above:* but still we might set them a great deal too much on Things below. For, if our Attachments to worldly Objects be strong, we shall frequently, either pursue what is hurtful, or be miserable that we dare not pursue it, or enraged at being crossed in our Designs, or dejected on finding small Happiness in our Attainments: which indeed are incapable of yielding much. The Delights of Sense are destructive, when indulged to Excess:

cefs: and low and inconfiderable, when conducted with Moderation. Wealth and Power and Rank are acquired with much Difficulty, attended with much Anxiety, and foon become familiar and taftelefs. Fondnefs for gay Amufements rather makes Men uneafy when they are without them, than gives any mighty Pleafure in the Midft of them: and, unlefs they manage with uncommon Prudence, waftes their Fortunes, wears out their Spirits, hurts their Characters, expofes them to Contempt. Indeed we cannot help on Reflexion contemning ourfelves, for fetting our Hearts on any of thefe Gratifications, to the Neglect of Matters vifibly worthier. But if we follow them to the Lofs of our Innocence, which generally happens when we follow them earneftly, then we have Caufe to hate ourfelves too, for tranfgreffing the Dictates of that inward Principle, which we feel ought to rule us, and which rewards us, when obeyed, with that pleafing Confcioufnefs of having acted well, which is the trueft Satisfaction we can tafte, though all were to end at Death. But even from this Enjoyment, without the Aid of Religion, we can promife ourfelves but little. Our Failures and Imperfections in Virtue muft be daily mortified: our righteft and kindeft Behaviour will

will often have ill Returns made to it: they whom we love with the moſt deſerved Affection, may be miſerable, or may be ſnatched from us: and if not, we muſt very ſoon leave them, and whatever we value. In ſuch Circumſtances, Diſengagement is evidently the only Way of ſecuring any Comfort. It will indeed, at the ſame Time, render our Condition flat and inſipid: but we can aim at nothing better from the Things of this World, without meeting with ſomething worſe: and if we are not contented with ſuch a State, (as in Truth how can we?) our ſole Remedy is to look beyond it: and conſider ourſelves,

II. Not merely as happening to be Inhabitants of the Duſt of Earth for a few Years, we know not how or why, but as created by the Power, and placed under the Authority and Protection, of a perfectly wiſe, and holy, and good Being, who hath made us capable of knowing and honouring, and therefore doubtleſs originally of imitating and obeying, him. On this farther View of Things it will plainly appear, that the Principle of Conſcience, which otherwiſe might often ſerve only to perplex and diſquiet Men, is the Law of God written in their Souls; and therefore that yielding

yielding to it will always end well: generally in this World, but certainly in another; for which human Nature was evidently framed. Here then the Diſtinction between *Things above* and *Things on Earth* begins to open, the Connection of Virtue with Happineſs becomes manifeſt; and excites us to deſpiſe the poor ſhort-lived Advantages that little Minds are fond of; to eſteem and practiſe what is right, be it ever ſo difficult, or ever ſo unfaſhionable, and devote our intire Exiſtence to the adorable Author of it. The principal Object, beyond Compariſon, of one who believes in God, muſt ſurely be God himſelf: and our Reverence and Love, our Dependence and Truſt, are ſo to be placed on him, as on nothing elſe in his whole Creation. But, above all, ſhould theſe Affections be exerted towards him in Reſpect of that future Recompence which we hope to receive from him. And we are greatly deficient in Prudence, as well as Gratitude, if we make not that Expectation the Support and the Delight of our Lives. But then the Temper of Heaven muſt be formed in us here, or we can never enjoy it hereafter: and therefore, if we would fix our Hearts on any Thing above to good Purpoſe, we muſt fix them on reſembling him who dwells there, in Purity and benevolent

nevolent Goodneſs. Cultivation of theſe Diſpoſitions is both an appointed Requiſite, and a neceſſary Preparative for our ſupreme Felicity: whereas immerſing ourſelves in Cares, or diſſipating ourſelves in Pleaſures, unrelated to Piety and Virtue, were they ever ſo harmleſs to thoſe around us, muſt be pernicious to ourſelves; rendering our Minds either groſs and ſenſual, or trifling and vain; unfit for the Enjoyment of ſpiritual Bliſs. Every Believer then, were it only of ſo much as Nature teaches, muſt think it his primary Concern to cheriſh religious Sentiments. And though he were uncertain of the Truth of his Belief, yet, in a Caſe of ſuch infinite Importance, there could be no Doubt of his Obligation to chuſe the ſafer Side. But, without farther Guidance, though he were not under that Neceſſity, he muſt be ſubject to others, and very alarming ones. It doth not appear to the Eye of unaſſiſted Reaſon, what Degree, or what Duration, of future Happineſs we might promiſe ourſelves, even were we innocent: much leſs what Sinners, as we all are, abundantly worſe than moſt of us think, have to expect from the Lord and Judge of all, to the Honour of whoſe Government Repentance and Amendment alone

may

may be no adequate Satisfaction, were they in our Power, which Persons left to themselves have too much Experience that they are not; yet however, since we are very sure, that right Sentiments and Behaviour must make every Man's Condition better, and wrong ones worse than it would be else; looking up to God, with Sorrow for our Transgressions, with Thankfulness for his Mercy hitherto, and humble Hope for it hereafter, must be the Duty and the Interest even of those who have no other Light than their own Understandings can afford them. But still the Obscurity of their Prospect must greatly diminish both their Consolation from it, and its good Influence upon them, and fill them with dreadful Terrors from Time to Time. God be thanked, therefore, that we are not left in the Darkness of natural Religion, but blest with that View of the Things above which proceeds from considering ourselves,

III. As the Disciples of Christ. If the Gospel of *Jesus* be true, and we have innumerable Demonstrations of it, then there is full Evidence, that a future State of eternal Happiness beyond Expression is attainable by Faith in our dear Redeemer, notwithstanding our past Sins, notwithstanding our present Infirmities.

For, having purchaſed for us Life by his Death, he hath given us Aſſurance of it by his Reſurrection, and, in Effect, raiſed up us at the ſame Time with himſelf. *If then we be* thus *riſen with Chriſt, where ſhall our Hearts be*, but where *our Treaſure is*[a]: fixed on him, whoſe Compaſſion planned the Scheme of our Salvation; on him whoſe Love executed it; on him whoſe Grace enables us to ſhare in it; on that Kingdom of Glory, in which we ſhall reign after Death; on thoſe heavenly Doctrines and Precepts, by which we are to prepare ourſelves for it in the mean While? That we *walk not by Sight, but by Faith*[b]; that we *labour not for the Meat that periſheth, but for that which endureth to eternal Life*[c]; that we *love not the World, neither the Things that are in the World*[d], but have *our Converſation in Heaven*[e], as *Fellow-citizens of the Saints, and* Members *of the Houſhold of God*[f].

There is a Poſſibility indeed of taking ſuch Exhortations in too ſtrict a Senſe, for Want of obſerving, that Rules, which we are apt to neglect and explain away, muſt be expreſſed in very ſtrong Terms to prevent this: and that

[a] Matth. vi. 21. Luke xii. 3[illegible]. [b] 2 Cor. v. 7.
[c] John vi. 27. [d] 1 John ii. 15.
[e] Phil. iii. 20. [f] Eph. ii. 19.

often

often in Scripture, when one Thing is commanded, and another seemingly prohibited, the Prohibition is not intended to be absolute, but comparative: as in the known Instance, *I will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice*[g]: when yet Sacrificing was both lawful and injoined; but still to be looked on as forbidden, if it came in Competition with a Precept of more Importance. Thus then we are to interpret the Direction of withdrawing our Hearts from this Earth. Not that we should lay aside the common Affairs of Life, in order to spend our whole Time in Devotion: Diligence in these Affairs is one great Duty of our *heavenly Calling*[h]. Not that we are restrained from using the good Creatures of God with Pleasure: for he hath *created them to be received with Thanksgiving*[i], and *given us richly all Things to enjoy*[k]. Not that we are to confine ourselves to mere Necessaries; for undeterminable Scruples would arise, what are Necessaries; and as Heaven hath provided us more, it would be only Perverseness, or Weakness, to refuse taking it. Not that Industry to raise and better our worldly Condition is blameable; for a Blessing from above is promised to

[g] Hos. vi. 6. Matth. ix. 13. xii. 7. [h] Heb. iii. 1.
[i] 1 Tim. iv. 3. [k] 1 Tim. vi. 17.

ſuch Induſtry. Not that we are to live in a perpetual Fright, becauſe it is doubtful, how far preciſely we may gratify our natural Deſires in this Thing or that: for we ſerve a gracious Maſter, who means that we ſhould be always chearful and eaſy in his Service, ſo long as to the beſt of our Judgements we are faithful in it. Not that we are to think even the gayer Accompliſhments of Life ſinful: but rather chuſe to make Virtue and Piety more amiable by them; provided it be only Virtue and Piety that we adorn with them. Not that we are bound altogether to decline Amuſements and Diverſions, in which others are immoderate, unleſs Example to them, or Danger to ourſelves, requires it: for their Abuſe doth not of Neceſſity make our Uſe of them unlawful, nor poſſibly ſometimes unexpedient. Not that we are to meaſure the Degree of our Goodneſs by that of our Auſterities and Abſtinences: *for*, if I may make a ſmall Change in the Apoſtle's Words, *neither if we eat not, are we the better; nor if we eat, are we the worſe*[l]. *The Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteouſneſs and Peace and Joy in the Holy Ghoſt*[m]. Much leſs are we to cenſure Perſons of a free Beha-

[l] 1 Cor. viii. 8. [m] Rom. xiv. 17.

viour:

viour: for conſcientious Watchfulneſs is very conſiſtent with an unconſtrained Appearance; and though *John* the Baptiſt, an excellent Man, was rigid and ſtrict; yet our bleſſed Lord, much the ſuperior Character, *came eating and drinking*, and converſed familiarly, as a Friend, *with Publicans and Sinners*[n].

Again: in like Manner we are to interpret the Direction of *ſetting our Affections on Things above*. Not that we muſt keep, or ſtrive to keep, our Thoughts as intent upon them continually, as we poſſibly can: for neither our Condition here, nor indeed our Frame, will bear it; which wants daily Relaxation as much as nightly Reſt; and without it, our Spirits will be overcome, our Health impaired, our Temper ſoured; and, by Conſequence, more Ground loſt in our Way to Heaven than we hoped to gain. Not that we ſhould doubt of our ſpiritual State, if the Movements of our Souls towards God, and our Delight in the Contemplation of future Happineſs, be attended with but little Warmth and Paſſion; for, though ſtrong religious Feelings are perfectly rational, and extremely deſireable, yet ſome Tempers are moved but weakly by any Thing; and what is preſent,

[n] Matth. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34.

and ſtrikes our Senſes, will, on the Whole, agitate moſt, if not all, of us more, than what is diſtant and ſpiritual. Still, if under theſe Diſadvantages, we ſo *love God as to keep his Commandments*[o], from reverent and thankful Motives of Duty to him, we give him that Proof of our Attachment, which he requires. Without this, the moſt fervent Affections will be unavailable: and with this, the calmeſt, which are often the trueſt and moſt perſevering, will be accepted. Nor, laſtly, are Men to deſpair on finding, that Regard to a better World is not only, as an inward Sentiment, much cooler, but, as a Principle of Action, much fainter than they have Cauſe to wiſh; and the Workings of earthly Deſires in their Breaſts powerful and vehement. For if the Victory be obtained, the Reward ſhall be in Proportion to the Toil of the Combat. And though it be not a complete Victory, yet if it be a real one, God may enable us to *go* on *from Strength to Strength*[p], till we are *in all Things more than Conquerors*[q]. Or, at the worſt, Failings, that will diminiſh our Recompence, may by no Means forfeit it.

[o] 1 John v. 3. [p] Pſal. lxxxiv. 7. [q] Rom. viii. 37.

But

But though a few, who are worthy of the utmoſt Regard, have ſo peculiar a Seriouſneſs and Tenderneſs of Soul, that ſhewing them how gentle and mild in Reality the ſeemingly ſevere Doctrines of Scripture are, is requiſite, both to ſecure their Peace and direct their Conduct: yet the general Propenſity is much on the other Side; and there is moſt Need to fear, that when once the Precepts on this Head have been acknowledged to ſignify nothing impracticable or extreme, they will ſoon be overlooked, as if they ſignified ſcarce any Thing at all. Now, it is poſſible to deceive ourſelves with almoſt whatever Imagination we will: but ſurely it is not eaſy to think That a ſlight Duty, of which the Word of God ſpeaks in ſuch Terms as you have already heard; in ſuch Declarations as that of St. *John*, *If any Man love the World, the Love of the Father is not in him*[r]; in ſuch Parables as that of the rich Man, who, not indeed merely for enjoying this Life, but for taking it as his Portion, and looking no farther, was irreverſibly doomed to the Place of Torment[s]. We may very allowably, in our Paſſage through the preſent World, both feel a Complacency in the Agreeableneſs of the Road,

[r] 1 John ii. 15. [s] Luke xvi. 19, &c.

 and

and endeavour to procure good Accommodations upon it: nay, by moderate Attentions of this Kind, prudently conducted, we may qualify ourſelves the better, both for the Buſineſs allotted us during our Journey, and the Employment for which we are deſigned at the Concluſion of it. But if we turn aſide into every flowery Path, and engage in every Purſuit that Inclination ſuggeſts: if we forget we are Travellers, conſider our Inns as Places of Abode, and adopt the Land of our Pilgrimage for our Country: what ſhall we anſwer at the laſt to him, who hath ſent us hither to do his Work; limited the Time for it; and given us the fulleſt Warning, that our future Condition depends on our preſent Induſtry or Negligence?

Let us reflect, therefore, whilſt it may avail us, in what Manner we are going on. The Bulk of Mankind, it is neceſſary, ſhould ſpend their Days in worldly Labours. But then it is equally neceſſary, that theſe ſhould be undertaken from a Principle of Religion, conducted ſuitably to the Laws of Religion, and accompanied with the Practice of religious Duties, public and private. They who plead Want of Leiſure for Devotion, can always find enough for Follies and Sins. They who plead Want of

Capacity

Capacity or Instruction, have, the meanest of them, been taught and learnt the indispensable Rules of Life: to believe in their Creator, their Redeemer, their Sanctifier; to behave virtuously, love Mankind, and honour God: doing which, they may offer up to him a Life of the lowest Occupations in sure Faith of his Acceptance. And if so much Regard to Things above be justly required even of these; what will be the Case of their Superiors, who voluntarily plunge themselves so deep, either in Cares or Pleasures, that he who made them *is not in all their Thoughts*[t]; or, if they cannot help sometimes remembering him, is indolently forgotten again, or studiously driven out? It is very true, Business must be attended, but always in Subordination to the one Thing needful. Recreations must be allowed; but not so as to become the great End of our Being. What Proportion then do our Employments of real Consequence bear to our trifling ones: and what Share, even of our serious Hours, do we give to God, to Improvement in Virtue, to the Contemplation of our latter End, to the Hope of Immortality? Too probably, much may be wanting to fit many of us for our final Account. And how joyfully so-

[t] Ps. x. 4.

ever they who are conſcious of their Title to Heaven, may partake of the innocent Delights of Earth: yet it is dreadful to ſee thoſe, who muſt know, if they would reflect, their Guilt to be unforgiven, and whoſe Sentence, whatever they imagine, is poſſibly juſt ready to fall upon their Heads, running round in a Circle of thoughtleſs Gaieties, inſtead of applying with penitent Humility for Pardon and Grace.

But, indeed, were the Goodneſs of ſuch examined, as are conceived by others and themſelves to have a great deal, would it not prove to be ſolely or chiefly relative to this World? We do Juſtice and ſpeak Truth: but is it from any better Motive than Reputation or Convenience? We pity and relieve the ſick and poor: but have we a like Concern for the ſpiritual Wants of Men? We are chaſte and temperate perhaps: but is it becauſe *the pure in Heart ſhall ſee God*[*], or to avoid Expence, and Diſeaſe, and Diſgrace? Our very Senſe of Duty, is it of Duty to the Author of our Beings; or do we not conſider more, what we owe to ourſelves, or other Men, than what we owe to him? Our Obligations to our Fellow-creatures we acknowledge frequently; but, except it be in a common Phraſe, that comes now

[*] Matth. v. 8.

and then out of our Mouths without attending to it; when do we expreſs any Thankfulneſs, any Subjection, any Relation at all, to the Giver of every good Gift? Or, if we have Sentiments of this Kind now and then, are they vigorous, or are they languid? We beſtow, it may be freely, our Money, our Time, our Pains, to gratify our Fancies, or promote our Intereſts, or ſerve our Friends: what Share of theſe do we employ to ſupport the Cauſe of Religion, to advance the Divine Honour? Temporal Diſappointments fill us with the deepeſt Sorrow: but do even Tranſgreſſions, and eſpecially do Failings and Imperfections in Chriſtian Virtues, affect us in any Degree approaching to it? And would not a conſiderable Solicitude on ſuch an Account appear to ſome of us, who are far from thinking themſelves void of Religion, rather an Evidence of a diſordered Mind, than a well-grounded Concern? Proſpects of temporal Advantage elate us with the higheſt Joy: do we experience equal Satisfaction, though we ought to experience much greater, from the Hopes of eternal Bleſſedneſs? We are uſually very ambitious of making as good a Figure as we poſſibly can in our preſent State: what Deſire do we ſhew of obtaining an honourable Diſtinction in the next?

next? Instead of this, we seem careful to exclude all Reflexion on future Existence. When we speak of the Death of an Acquaintance, when we put the Supposition of our own, how commonly do we consider it, as if Nothing whatever were to follow after, and how seldom as an Introduction to an infinitely more important Life! Are we not indeed, some how or other, ashamed to mention, as if it were improper, our Faith in a Judgment to come, as a Reason against Sin, a Motive to Holiness, a Support under Affliction; or to acknowledge ourselves influenced by it in any one Article of Conduct? Or, if we do admit another State to suggest itself to us, perhaps we think more of Hell with slavish Terror, than of Heaven with filial Gratitude. Nay, even when we think of Heaven, too commonly, if the Truth were known, we have extremely faint Wishes for it, or Inclinations towards it. Yet, we can neither attain it, nor enjoy it, without loving it: and to love it in Deed, we must love Purity and Benevolence, the Company of good Men, the Worship of God: love to celebrate the Praises of him that sits on the Throne, and the Lamb at his right Hand: to meditate on the Mercy of our heavenly Father,

the

the Condeſcenſion and the Glories of his eternal Son, the gracious Inſpirations of his holy Spirit; our miſerable Condition by Nature, our bleſſed one through the Goſpel of Chriſt, our Proſpect of improving in pious and virtuous Affection to all Eternity. Now theſe, it may be feared, are the Things of all others, that the Thoughts of many of us dwell on leaſt, and with the leaſt Satisfaction: yet we call ourſelves Chriſtians, and hope to be ſaved.

Nor muſt it be denied, that great Imperfection in ſpiritual Deſires may be conſiſtent with a State of Acceptance. But the farther ſuch Deſires come ſhort of their due Vigour, the weaker Evidence we ſhall have of what we are moſt concerned to know: the nearer they advance towards it, the greater will be our Comfort and Help from above; for *to him that hath, ſhall be given*[w]: and though, from natural Cauſes, they may ſink, without Danger, beneath what they once were, in ſenſible Warmth, yet if their practical Effects begin to leſſen, it ſhould be an alarming Admonition, to *remember from whence we are fallen, and repent and do our firſt Works*[x]; *to be watchful and ſtrengthen the Things which remain, that are ready to die*[y].

[w] Matth. xiii. 12. [x] Rev. ii. 5. [y] Ib. iii. 2.

The Methods to reſtore, to preſerve and heighten our devout Breathings towards *the Father of Spirits*[a], and the Place of his Abode, are theſe: that we appoint, and reſolutely ſecure to ourſelves frequent Seaſons for examining and rectifying thoſe wrong Apprehenſions of Things which our own corrupt Natures, the Commerce of the World, and the Suggeſtions of the wicked one are ſo apt to give us: that then we recollect the Vanity, Inſtability, and momentary Duration, of every earthly Good, the Certainty of the unſeen State, the eternal Continuance of its Joys and Sufferings, the inſeparable Connexion of the one or the other with our preſent Sentiments and Behaviour; the Authority and Holineſs of God, our own Frailty, Guilt, and Weakneſs; the Sacrifice and Reſurrection, the Aſcenſion and Interceſſion, of our bleſſed Mediator; and when we have filled our Souls with theſe great Truths, lay open the Workings of them before the Lord of all, in ſuitable Confeſſions, Petitions, and Praiſes: that, if we find not at firſt the Pleaſure or the Benefit we wiſh from ſuch Exerciſes, we perſevere in them notwithſtanding; yet ſo as not to let them become, either on the one Hand empty Forms, or on the

[a] Heb. xii. 9.

other

other unneceſſary Burthens; but employ them diſcreetly, as Means to arrive at our End: that we aſſiſt our Devotions and Reflexions chiefly by the inimitable Spirit that breathes in the Holy Scriptures: but alſo by the Uſe of other good Books, and religious Converſation, judiciouſly choſen: that we abſtain conſcientiouſly, as far as we can, from every Thing, of every Sort, which we find hath a Tendency to corrupt or deaden our Hearts; but particularly that we ſhelter our tender Piety from the Blaſts of Scoffers with the utmoſt Caution; indeed rather hide it from their Knowledge, than expoſe it to their Ridicule, yet never deny ourſelves to be what we are: that we conſtantly attend the public Service of God, not as Matter of Cuſtom or Entertainment, but with a faithful Care to join fervently in his Worſhip, to learn meekly from his Word, and cheriſh by Reflexion afterwards whatever good Impreſſions we have felt at the Time: that we ſtatedly come to the holy Table with due Preparation, vow peculiarly, in partaking of it, *to live by the Faith of the Son of God*[*]; and, as we profeſs uniting ourſelves to him by Means of it, remember, that *He who is joined*

[*] Gal. ii. 20.

to the Lord is one Spirit[b]. Nor ſhould we conſider only the Duty of being heavenly-minded, but alſo its Advantages. We ſhall ceaſe to fear Death in Proportion as we ſet our Affections on what is to follow it; and *have Hope, as an Anchor of the Soul, ſure and ſtedfaſt, and which entereth into that within the Vail, whither the Forerunner is entered for us*[c]. We ſhall ſcorn *to enjoy the Pleaſures of Sin for a Seaſon*, if *we have Reſpect to the Recompence of Reward*; bear whatever Sufferings our Chriſtian Obedience may expoſe us to, *as ſeeing Him, who is inviſible*[d]. We ſhall *take joyfully* the Loſs of worldly *Goods, knowing we have in Heaven a better and an enduring Subſtance*[e]. When we are deprived of our deareſt Friends, we ſhall *refrain our Voice from Weeping, and our Eyes from Tears, for our Work ſhall be rewarded, and they ſhall come again from the Land of the Enemy*[f]. We ſhall *run with Patience the Race that is ſet before us, looking unto Jeſus, who endured the Croſs, deſpiſing the Shame, and is ſet down at the right Hand of the Throne of God*[g]. The more we contemplate him, the more we ſhall love

[b] 1 Cor. vi. 17. [c] Heb. vi. 19 20. [d] Ib. xi. 25, 26, 27. [e] Ib. x. 34. [f] Jer. xxxi. 16. [g] Heb. xii. 1, 2.

him, the more we ſhall conſequently feel we are beloved by him. And when once *we have taſted, that the Lord is gracious* [h], we ſhall be *filled with all Joy and Peace in believing, and abound in Hope through the Power of the Holy Ghoſt* [i], till we can ſay experimentally with the Pſalmiſt, *I am alway by thee: thou haſt holden me by my right Hand. Thou ſhalt guide me with thy Counſel, and after that receive me with Glory. Whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon Earth that I deſire in Compariſon of thee. My Fleſh and my Heart faileth: but God is the Strength of my Heart, and my Portion for ever* [k].

[h] 1 Pet. ii. 3. [i] Rom. xv. 13. [k] Pſ. lxxiii. 22—25.

SERMON IX.

1 JOHN ii. 7, 8.

Brethren, I write no new Commandment unto you, but an old Commandment, which ye had from the Beginning: the old Commandment is the Word, which ye have heard from the Beginning.

Again, a new Commandment I write unto you: which Thing is true in him and in you; because the Darkness is past, and the true Light now shineth.

THESE Words contain a very useful Piece of Instruction, expressed in a Manner somewhat obscure and enigmatical, on Purpose to excite that Attention, which they will soon reward by the Discovery of their Meaning. Probably they were designed to be more especially understood of the great Precept, inculcated immediately after them, of universal Good-will: an original Duty of Mankind, but strangely forgotten throughout the Earth, till our Saviour taught it more

 clearly

clearly, and inforced it more ſtrongly, than had ever been done before. Yet they are equally applicable to the Whole of Chriſtianity: and it might very well be the Apoſtle's Meaning to extend them ſo far, and ſet forth in them a Truth, wonderfully fitted to give both a juſt and engaging Notion of the Goſpel: that its general Purpoſe is to make Men happy, by reſtoring amongſt them the Belief and Practice of the primitive univerſal Religion of rational Beings; that its peculiar Doctrines were all introduced by the Change of human Circumſtances, and are the ſame in Subſtance with thoſe, of which the Patriarchs and *Jews* received imperfect Notices, and typical Repreſentations in antient Time: that being thus, in Reſpect of God's early Promulgation of it, an *old Commandment*; it was yet, with Reſpect to the Age in which our Saviour republiſhed it, a *new* one; as *Darkneſs* had covered the World, which by his Means was driven away; and the *Light* of Truth diſplayed again, with a Brightneſs and reviving Warmth, till then unknown. For Chriſtianity added much Evidence and Diſtinctneſs to many important, and many comfortable Articles of Faith; and then building on them the correſponding Obliga-

tions

tions of Duty, completed on the old Foundations a Structure, only so far new as the State of Mankind required it should be. This is, doubtless, an advantageous View of the Christian Dispensation; representing it as doing for us exactly what we needed to have done; and that it is likewise a just View of it, I shall endeavour to shew, by laying before you,

The Nature of Religion as it stood at first.

The Condition of Mankind afterwards: and

The Fitness of the Gospel to that Condition.

The Duty of Man, so far as it was discoverable to him by Reason, whilst he continued innocent, must consist in Love, Honour, and Obedience, to his Maker, Benefactor, and Sovereign Lord, joined with the Care of copying the divine Goodness in his Behaviour to his Fellow-creatures, and the divine Holiness in the rational Government of himself. It is plain, that he could be obliged to no more, unless God was pleased, by Revelation, to superadd more; and as plain, that he was obliged to the Whole of this. For to pretend Reverence to our Father in Heaven, yet to misuse his Children and our Brethren on Earth; or to behave with Affection, Dutifulness and Gratitude amongst them,

and yet shew none to him; and to profess both a righteous and godly Life, yet to fail of the Obligations of a sober one, contradicting and debasing Reason by brutal Excesses and Irregularities, is evidently faulty and inconsistent. The same Regard to Truth and Right, which requires any of these Things, requires them all. So that neither Piety and Morals can be separated from each other, nor any Part of either from the rest: but the Whole hath one Foundation; and is indeed one Temper of mind, only exerted towards different Objects. In this happy Rectitude of Heart and Behaviour, consists the Image of God, the Perfection of Man, the original Religion of all Creatures, capable of Religion, throughout the Universe.

Supposing, therefore, any Creature fallen from this blessed State, restoring him to it again must be the only ultimate End to which any useful Endeavours of his own, or any gracious Designs of Heaven for his Good, can be directed. Now, this is our Case. We are fallen, by the Fault of our first Parents transgressing an easy revealed Commandment, superadded very justly to the natural ones, as a further Trial of their Obedience; we are fallen, I say, thus from Uprightness

rightneſs of Nature and Immortality: and we feel convincing Effects of that melancholy Change. We are alſo fallen, by our own Fault, lower ſtill, from perſonal Innocence into perſonal Guilt; and from this Condition we want to be recovered. But that we cannot be, nor deſire to be, till we are ſenſible of our Miſery and Danger, and ſorry for the Sins that have reduced us to ſo wretched a Condition. Here then begins the Neceſſity of Repentance: a Duty for which there was no Room in the primitive State of Things; but in ours, the Ground-work of all that we have to hope for. And this Duty comprehends, not only that we condemn ourſelves of Folly, for having acted contrary to our Intereſts; and of Baſeneſs, for having violated the Dictates of our inward Senſe of Virtue; but of ill Deſert in diſobeying God. The Grief and Shame attending Repentance will vary in their Expreſſion, according to the Variety of Mens natural Conſtitutions. But Diſapprobation of Sin, and Care of Amendment, are neceſſary Proofs of its Genuineneſs. And to theſe the Offender is abſolutely bound, how ſmall ſoever his Hope of Pardon may be. For having done amiſs can, in no Circumſtances, juſtify the Neglect of doing better:

every Increaſe of Guilt muſt be expected to increaſe the Puniſhment.

But ſtill, as our Spirit and Vigour in acting will be proportionable to the Encouragement on which we act; without ſome good Proſpect of Forgiveneſs and Acceptance, Men would have ſo little Heart to go through the Difficulties of Reformation, that ſcarce any Regard to Religion would be preſerved in the World. And therefore God hath enabled us, by the mere Uſe of Reaſon, to conclude it probable, that as Goodneſs is always the Object of his Favour, ſo whenever we return to it really, though imperfectly, he will look on us anew, with Tenderneſs and Complacence. For *like as a Father pitieth his Children, ſo the Lord pitieth them that fear him: for he knoweth our Frame, he remembereth that we are but Duſt*[a]. But then, whether it be conſiſtent with the Holineſs of his Nature, and the Honour of his Government, that Repentance ſhould obtain Pardon in all Caſes, or in which; and whether in any, without ſome admonitory and exemplary Correction firſt; and how ſevere ſuch Correction may be; though it nearly concerns us, who can ſay, unleſs Knowledge be given him from above?

[a] Pſal. ciii. 13, 14.

Another

Another Point, of great Importance to fallen and sinful Man, is this. Partly by the original Depravation of our Nature, partly by our actual Transgressions, the Strength of the human Mind is grievously weakened, and we find in ourselves a sad Inability of doing, what yet we know we ought to do, and were made for, and cannot become happy without doing. Now what shall relieve us here? When indeed we contemplate God's continual Providence and Care, even over the meanest of his Works, and reflect that the Improvement of his rational Creatures in Piety and Virtue must be the principal End of his Creation; we cannot but hope, that he will condescend to assist us in it; inspire us with good Purposes, and direct and strengthen us in the Execution of them. But still Hope is not Certainty: and the weaker our Hope is, the fainter will our Efforts be: and whether, after great and habitual Sins, we may promise ourselves the aid of his Spirit at all, though then we need it most, Reason cannot judge on any certain Grounds.

A third most material Article, on which it throws a little Light, but a Light greatly overcast with Clouds and Doubts, is that of a future State. Considering the immortal Nature of

Man's Soul, the evident Capacity it hath for much higher Degrees of Knowledge and Virtue, than it ever attains here; and the earnest Desires of a future Being, which the wisest and best Men feel beyond others: considering the many Miseries to which we are subject in this Life, the few and low Enjoyments of which we are capable, and the strange Disproportion with which both are divided; while the good too frequently suffer every Thing that is terrible for the Sake of their Goodness; and the bad very commonly obtain the utmost Prosperity by the Means of their Wickedness: Men have never failed in any Age of the World to entertain some Expectation of a better and more equal Sate hereafter. But how long or how short its Duration will be, how great or how small its Reward, and what Qualifications will intitle us to any, and what Share of them; our unassisted Faculties only guess: and the Subject appears in a very great Measure to lie out of our Reach.

But the divine Mercy gave additional Hopes to Men from the very Beginning, beyond what Reason was able to furnish; with useful, though general and obscure, Intimations of the Means, by which these Hopes were to be accomplished.

complished. Our first Parents were told, that the *Seed of the Woman should bruise the Head*, and destroy the Power, *of* that *Serpent*[b]; which had brought into the World Sin and Death. Sacrifices were accepted, as early as the Days of *Abel*. *Enoch*, for his Piety, though undoubtedly not a faultless one, was translated to a happier Life. *Noah* was assured, that the *Spirit of God strove with Men*[c] to reform them. And these reviving Truths, possibly with many more Circumstances and Evidences of them, were certainly propagated amongst all *Noah*'s Children: of which there remain clear and numerous Footsteps in the following Ages.

But by Degrees Negligence and Wickedness introduced Ignorance and Superstition: and these in their Turn augmented Negligence and Wickedness: till the Patriarchal Doctrines were forgotten or perverted; the spiritual Worship of God laid aside for Idolatry; and his Nature and Perfections so grossly misunderstood, that it is no Wonder if Pardon of Sins, Assistance in right Conduct, and a Recompence after Death, were either not thought of, or expected on Conditions absurd, and even immoral. For the Knowledge of the commonest Duties of Life was in

[b] Gen. iii. 15. [c] Ib. vi. 3.

many Cases utterly lost; and shocking Crimes considered as perfectly lawful, nay exalted into Acts of Religion. Thus then did the Nations of the Earth, to speak in the Language of St. *Paul, walk in the Vanity of their Minds, having the Understanding darkened, being alienated from the Life of God*[d].

Suppose now any one to have made it his Business, in this lamentable State of Things, to teach Men their Duty to God, their Fellow-creatures, and themselves; and to have given them only such Instruction in it, with such Hopes of Acceptance and Recompence, as the mere Light of Nature could afford: what a Publisher of good Tidings, what a noble Benefactor to Mankind, would such a one have been! And had he further appointed a Number of his Followers to travel through every Land, combat the reigning Errors and Follies, establish the Truth in their Stead, and settle a Succession of Men to support it for ever; how highly would the Institution, and the Author of it, have been honoured by the well-disposed throughout the Earth! But no Person appeared, who had either Abilities to execute, or Greatness of Mind to conceive, so vast and

[d] Eph. iv. 17, 18.

ex-

excellent a Deſign. The Founders, Lawgivers, and Rulers, of Kingdoms and Commonwealths, if they ſtudied the temporal Welfare of thoſe under their Care, for which they often provided very injudiciouſly, had little farther Regard even to their Morals, and to their Religion ſcarce any at all: but patronized and ſet up whatever Form of it, either the People were accuſtomed to obſerve, or their own Fancy, or the Example of their Neighbours, happened to ſuggeſt. So that there was not, for many Ages, in all the known Countries of the Gentile World, a ſingle Inſtance of rational public Worſhip of the true God. Then for the Philoſophers; moſt of them ſpent the chief of their Time in Speculations, that had ſmall Connexion with Virtue and Piety. And they who did turn their Minds to examine into the Obligations and the Hopes of Men had very imperfect, very erroneous, Notions of both; tolerated, and even applauded, great Sins; had ſcarce any Notion at all, either of inward Humility, or of Repentance towards God; were very wavering, to ſay no worſe, in their Belief of future Rewards; and had yet leſs Apprehenſions of future Puniſhments. Beſides, they differed from one another in moſt material Points,

Points, but all agreed in conforming to whatever false Worship was established: and, had they held more Truth than they did, were so little regarded, in any Thing right, by the Generality of their Fellow-citizens; that they confined their Discourses to a small Number of their private Disciples, and left the Multitude to live and die like the Beasts that perish. This undeniably was, and had long been, the Case, when Christianity appeared. And though human Reason might have taught Men more than it did; yet they, whom it did not, were never the better for that Possibility: nor was there any Likelihood of its becoming Fact.

Such was the Condition of the Gentiles. That of the *Jews* in the mean Time was very different, but became at Length almost as bad. They had received, from their Ancestor *Abraham*, further Notices of God's gracious Intentions. They had received, from their Legislator *Moses*, a great Blessing, an authorized written System of true Religion and moral Virtue; with additional Precepts, to preserve them from Idolatry, separate them from the Nations that professed it, and exhibit to them a more particular, but dark, Representation of

good

good Things to come, which would naturally engage their Attention and Expectation all along; and, being explained when God saw fit, would shew, that the Purpose, which he executed in later Times, he had formed in the earliest. After this, they received from a long Succession of Prophets, ampler and more spiritual Instructions, fuller Assurances of God's Forgiveness and Grace, clearer Notifications of a future State, and more circumstantial Accounts of an extraordinary Person to arise from the Family of *David*, by whom all the divine Blessings were to be conveyed to all the World, on the Condition of believing and obeying him.

These undoubtedly were great Advantages. Yet for a long Time, notwithstanding them all, they were continually associating Idols with the true God, and even the vilest Parts of Heathen Worship with his. And when they came to profess a stricter Adherence to their own Religion, they grievously perverted the most essential Articles of it. They worked themselves into a Hatred of other Nations, against whom they were indeed commanded to be on their Guard, but still to love them. They promised themselves a temporal Deliverer,

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to establish for their Benefit an universal Kingdom of this World: instead of one to free them from Sin and Death. They neglected the weightier, the moral Parts of their Law; and grew so minutely and absurdly observant of the ceremonial, that at Length they imagined, their whole Duty to God consisted in outward Forms; by a scrupulous Practice of which, they conceited themselves to merit every Thing from him, without any one good Quality within.

When therefore the Wisdom of the wisest Nations had proved Foolishness, and the Piety of the best instructed sadly degenerated into Superstition, our heavenly Father mercifully and seasonably sent forth his Son, to renew *the old Commandment which was in the Beginning*, to perfect those Additions to it which the Alteration of human Circumstances had required, and perpetuate the Knowledge of the Whole to the End of Time.

That the ultimate Design of Christianity is re-establishing the Love of God, the Love of Men, the Love of Virtue, is obviously plain from the whole New Testament: particularly, from our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount; from his Answer to the Question, *Which is the great Command-*

Commandment in the Law[c]: from St. *James*'s Declaration, what is *pure and undefiled Religion before God and the Father*[f]: from St. *Paul*'s Discourse to the *Athenians*: from his Observation, that *Love is the End of the Commandment*[g]: from his explicit Assertion, that the *Grace of God appeared* for this Purpose, to *teach all Men, that, denying Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present World, looking for the glorious Hope*[h] of a better. And the Re-establishment, which the Gospel hath made in this Respect, is perfect. It requires such Love of God, as will incline us effectually to imitate, as well as honour him; such Love of Men, as extends to the whole World, and seeks both the temporal and the spiritual Good of all; such Love of Virtue, as is free from Ostentation, from Austerity, from Self-Opinion. It lays us under a Necessity of remembering, that we are frail, that we are Sinners; and therefore most firmly bound to Humility in our own Hearts, Mildness towards others, Penitence in the Sight of God. To those who are in any Degree thus disposed, it not only repeats the obscurer, yet instructive and comfortable, Inti-

c Matth. xxii. 36.
f James i. 27.
g 1 Tim. i. 5.
h Tit. ii. 11, 12, 13.

mations, of Pardon, Grace, and Reward; which the Patriarchal Ages enjoyed, *as a Light ſhining faintly in a dark Place*[i]; and which After-times loſt, and wandered on in the thickeſt Night: but it viſits Men like *the Day-Spring from on high*, cloſe followed by the Sun of Righteouſneſs beaming forth to cheer our Hearts, and *guide our Feet into the Way of Peace*[k]. Inſtead of the Shadows and Figures of the *Moſaic* Law, which veiled, and, in a great Meaſure, concealed, what they exhibited; it preſents us with the undiſguiſed Truth and very Subſtance: ſets before our Eyes that great Atonement to the Juſtice of Heaven, which other Victims were appointed to preſignify; and opens the whole Treaſure of divine Bounty; free Forgiveneſs, kind Aſſiſtance, eternal Happineſs, to the worſt of Sinners, on the equitable, the advantageous Terms of ingenuous Sorrow, thankful Faith, and univerſal, though ſtill imperfect, Obedience. *Come every one that thirſteth, come to the Waters* of Life, and *buy without Money and without Price*[l]. Inſtead of a heavy Yoke of ceremonial Reſtraints, and rigorous Obſervances unexplained, neceſſary for the immature and injudicious Age of the *Jewiſh* Diſ-

[i] 2 Peter i. 19. [k] Luke i. 78, 79. [l] Iſa. lv. i.

penſation;

penſation; God hath conſidered Chriſtians as grown up to a manly Capacity of rational Service, and fuller Knowledge of his Counſels. He hath therefore communicated to us a much greater Number of doctrinal Truths, all fitted to inſtruct our Worſhip, and inflame our Gratitude: but hath reduced our ritual Performances to two: both of them clear and important in their Meaning; eaſy and affecting in their Uſe, and fully guarded againſt being eſteemed beyond their Uſe: firſt, Baptiſm, which moſt aptly ſignifies our Engagements to preſerve ourſelves from the Defilement of Sin, and God's Promiſe to look on us as free from the Guilt of it: then the holy Euchariſt: which, with equal Propriety, expreſſes our Saviour's giving his Body to be broken, and his Blood to be ſhed, for the Sake of Man; and our being nouriſhed, and ſtrengthened, and united to him for ever, by imbibing and digeſting his Doctrine, and receiving into our Souls, by Faith, the beneficial Influences of his Death.

Thus then the *new Commandment*, delivered by our bleſſed Lord, is an authentic Republication, both of the primitive Religion of Man before the Fall, and of the additional Inſtructions given him after it; with ſuch

Improvements of theſe laſt, as make up, together with the former, a complete Inſtitution of Piety, fitted to anſwer all our Neceſſities to the World's End. To prevent or detect any Corruptions or Miſtakes in ſo important a Syſtem of Doctrine, the bleſſed Author of it hath provided, that we ſhould have the very Words, in which he delivered it, recorded in the Goſpels; and his true Meaning confirmed, and further explained, in the Writings of his immediate Diſciples: which ineſtimable Treaſure Providence hath watched over through every Age: and, by its Aſſiſtance, the *old Commandment* hath once more in theſe latter Days been reſcued from dangerous Perverſions, and happily reſtored to its original Purity.

But beſides, he hath made yet another Proviſion for ſecuring, not only the genuine Belief, but the faithful Practice of it. As Man is a ſocial Creature, and capable of receiving at leaſt as much Benefit from uniting in Religion, as in other Things: ſo he hath formed his Followers into a ſpiritual Society, or Church; to celebrate the Worſhip of God more ſolemnly, and bear a public Teſtimony to his Truths; to exhort, and *provoke*

one

one another to love and good Works[m]; *to restore in the Spirit of Meekness them that are overtaken in Faults*[n], but *put away from amongst them the* grossly and obstinately *wicked*[o]; that, if possible, the Reverence of so awful a Censure may bring them to recollect themselves and repent; or, supposing it fails, that yet the Innocence of the rest, and the Honour of the Christian Name, may be preserved. And that all this may be performed in a due Manner, he hath instituted a regular Subordination and Succession of *Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the edifying of the Body of Christ*[q]. An Appointment evidently suitable, both to the Nature of a Being, which so greatly wants Instruction and Admonition, as Man; and to the Nature of a Religion, that will so very well bear to be shewn in a full Light. However defectively, therefore, or wrongly, this Institution may be administered through our Faults; or how much soever it may be despised, or obstructed, through yours; yet, in itself, it is visibly of excellent Use; and, which is remarkable, peculiar to the Religion delivered in Scripture. For, in the Gentile

m Heb. x. 24, 25.
n Gal. vi. 1.
o 1 Cor. v. 13.
p Eph. iv. 11, 12.

SERMON X.

1 PETER iv. 8.

And above all Things have fervent Charity among yourselves: for Charity shall cover the Multitude of Sins.

A Religion, the Precepts of which are all just and good, must immediately be acknowledged to be so far true; but if, besides, the general Temper from which it appoints every particular Duty to be done, be the proper and right one, then the Argument in its Favour strengthens. And if, lastly, the Means which it prescribes to form this Temper, be well adapted to produce it in the worst of Men, and raise it still higher in the best, nothing more can be wanting to prove the practical Part of such an Institution, which is always the most important Part, worthy of him, who alone perfectly knows both the Obligations arising from our original Nature, and the Assistances needful in our present Circumstances.

Now

Now this is evidently the Case of Christianity. Its Injunctions comprehend every Dictate, the very purest and sublimest, of natural Piety and Virtue, without any single Article contradictory to them: whereas all Religions of human Invention have both omitted right Things, and commanded wrong ones. The Precepts it hath added, peculiar to itself, are few and unexceptionable. And the Motives from which the Whole is to be practised, are two, the most rational and excellent that can be conceived: *the first and great Commandment, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart; and the second like unto it, thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself*[a]: both which have one original Source; that inward Esteem of moral Goodness and Rectitude, which must incline us to adore it in our Maker, cultivate it in ourselves, and exercise it towards our Fellow-creatures.

This is the genuine Spirit of the Gospel: and it is plainly the worthiest and noblest that our Nature, or any Nature, is capable of: too noble, indeed, for human Minds, weak and depraved as they are, to be wholly influenced by at first. And therefore we are trained up to it

[a] Matth. xxii. 37, 38, 39.

gradually,

gradually, by a preparatory Diſcipline of Threatenings to reſtrain, and Promiſes to excite us; of religious Appointments to remind us of our Duty, viſible Signs to make ſtronger Impreſſions of it, worldly Trials of many Kinds to exerciſe and confirm us in it; till, through a Courſe of this improving Education, we grow up to our Maturity; and *that which is perfect being come, that which is in Part be done away*[b]. Then God in his own good Time ſhall tranſlate us into a better World, and removing, as ſuperfluous, now, thoſe temporary Aids, which, in ſome Degree, obſcured the Building they contributed to raiſe, its Beauty ſhall appear complete, and its Duration eternal.

Therefore, in every Act, and every Thought of Religion, we ſhould always remember, that the only true Meaſure of our Improvement, is the Increaſe of that virtuous Affection, which St. *Paul* hath declared to be *the End of the Commandment*[c], Love to God, and Love to his whole Creation; eſpecially our own Species, or as large a Proportion of it as our Behaviour can affect. The former Part of this bleſſed Temper, that which regards our Maker, hath been taught ſo unintelligibly, and perverted ſo

[b] 2 Cor. xiii. 10. [c] 1 Tim. i. 5.

wildly,

wildly, by some, and, partly in consequence of that, rejected with such Scorn, or admitted with such Diffidence, by others; that to the great Disadvantage and Dishonour of Religion, it hath obtained but little Place in the Souls of Men, even of those, who think themselves pious and devout. And yet, if Goodness be the natural Object of Love, and infinite Goodness of the highest Love that we can exert, surely the Meaning of Love to God is as plain, and the Obligation to it as indispensable, as the Feeling of it is delightful, and the Fruits excellent.

Love to our Fellow-creatures, the second Precept of our blessed Lord, which in the Text is rendered *Charity*, the original Word being the very same, hath indeed so far escaped better than the first, as to be in general Terms well spoken of by all the World. But, at the same Time, its Nature hath often been ill understood; and its Worth seldom considered near enough, yet sometimes exalted a great deal too much.

For these Reasons, I shall endeavour,

I. To settle the right Notion of this Virtue.

II. To shew the just Value of it: particularly its Influence in what both St. *Peter* and St. *James* ascribe to it, *covering of Sins*.

I. To

I. To ſettle the right Notion of it: a Thing the more neceſſary, becauſe the Word, by which it is here expreſſed, hath greatly altered its Meaning. Charity, in common Speech at preſent, almoſt conſtantly ſignifies, either judging favourably of the Actions and Intentions of others, or relieving their Diſtreſſes: whereas, in the New Teſtament, it never ſignifies theſe particularly, and ſcarce ever any ſingle Virtue, but that general Benevolence of Diſpoſition, which prompts us, on all Occaſions, to mild Thoughts and beneficent Deeds; and on which, wrought in us by the Grace of our Redeemer, depends their true Worth and Acceptance with God. For this Reaſon, St. *Paul* very juſtly ſuppoſes a Caſe poſſible, which elſe might well ſeem a very ſtrange one, that of a Man's beſtowing all he hath to feed the Poor, and not having Charity; for he may only have Vanity or Ambition; and as juſtly determines upon it, that ſuch Liberality ſhall *profit him nothing* [d]. Charity, therefore, is an inward Principle of univerſal kind Affection: and the Seeds of it are ſown in that conſtitutional Goodneſs of Nature, of which, notwithſtanding our lamentable Degeneracy by the Fall, every Man hath ſome remaining De-

[d] 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

gree; the larger the happier, if we manage it with due Care. For in this, as in every Part of our Frame, watchful Conduct and judicious Culture of our Powers and Propensities; promoting their Growth in some Instances, restraining it in others, and directing it in all, is highly necessary to their attaining Maturity, and bringing forth valuable Fruit. When properly regulated, the most terrible of our Passions, Anger, becomes the Minister of Good; and, when left to run wild, the most amiable of our inward Feelings, Good-nature, is often almost wholly useless, and sometimes the Parent of much Evil.

Thus, to say Nothing of those, whose Pretences to it are mere Affectation, who extol Benevolence to the Skies in Talk, but give no Proof of it in any Thing beyond Talk: the Good-nature of some, who have a Sort of it, is intirely notional and romantic. They can be affected most deeply by a moving Story; weep over even a feigned Distress, when well described, or barely represented to them by Fancy; and perhaps weep a second Time at reflecting on their own meritorious Tenderness: yet, in real Cases that come before them, can see the heaviest Afflictions without being moved; nay, can

can even produce them with a moſt unrelenting Steadineſs, when their Pleaſures, or Intereſts, or favourite Schemes, require it. And thus they cultivate, in Idea, the moſt refined and exalted Sentiments of Humanity, which no one living is ever the better for.

Some again are a little more in Earneſt than this comes to: but ſo very little, that, inſtead of *fervent Charity*, it amounts to no more than languid ineffectual Good-will. They wiſh well, it may be, to all the World: applaud others highly, when they relieve the diſtreſſed; approve it, are ſincerely glad of it; will, on occaſion, ſolicit and preſs them to it: but if they themſelves are called upon to do likewiſe, know not how to part with any Thing worth naming, be they poſſeſſed of ever ſo great Superfluity; and have a thouſand Reaſons to alledge, why they cannot, or need not do, what moſt evidently they both can and ought.

Another Sort of Perſons will give their Money freely enough: for they have no Regard to Money. But if they are wanted to beſtow a little Pains or Contrivance towards extricating any one out of Difficulties, that is too hard a Taſk, though it would do ever ſo much Good. To think of the Diſtreſs of a Fellow-creature

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is grievous to them; but to set about helping him would be more so: and therefore, instead of condemning and throwing off their Indolence, they turn their Eyes another Way to make themselves easy, and let every Thing grow as much worse as it can.

The Goodness of a fourth Sort is very warm, but extremely short-lived. They will promise Wonders and mean all they say; but forget it in a Day's Time: and just then would do every Thing for a Man, whom in their next Turn of Humour they will do Nothing for. So that, till they are known, they mislead and disappoint almost as many, as they undertake to serve.

Another very blameable Kind of Good-nature is a partial one. That Principle must evidently be planted in us for the Benefit of all without Exception: and yet we most of us, it may be feared, either openly or secretly, except Multitudes. The very Gospel of *Christ*, that was designed to establish universal Charity, hath been dreadfully perverted to destroy it: and the Doctrine of Love abused, to excite in Men the bitterest Hatred to every Persuasion but their own. Nor have they, who profess the greatest Abhorrence of such Practices, by any Means been

been free from a very ill-natured Zeal against Religion, while they have censured most vehemently that Kind of Zeal for it. But in the Affairs of civil and common Life; many, that on some Occasions have the easiest and mildest Tempers, on others, preserve no Temper at all. Sometimes the Spirit of Party takes such Possession of very well-meaning Men, that they abominate one Half of the World round them, it may be for they do not well know what. Sometimes again the most humane Creature upon Earth to those whom he happens to like, entertains and delights them with the keenest Satire and Ridicule on such, as he or they happen to dislike, or barely to consider with Indifference. The Agreeableness of not a few, who have a great deal, is almost intirely lavished on mere common Acquaintance: while those nearer Friends at Home, who are intitled to the largest Share of their Good-humour and Regard, experience continually their Peevishness or Neglect. And on the contrary, others are so tenderly and immoderately fond of one or more Bosom Favourites, that they applaud themselves, and, to be sure, are applauded by these at least, as the best and worthiest of Mankind: yet will slight most contemptuously all but such dear

Friends; and injure most unmercifully every one else, that stands in the Way of them: nay perhaps too, must as constantly have some Persons to hate without Cause, as others to love without Merit. From a Foresight of this Danger it probably was, that our blessed Saviour, though he had recommended private Friendship by his Example, enjoined it by no Precept; as well knowing, that a proper Degree of general Good-will would seldom fail to unite Men as closely, as was requisite for their own Benefit, or consistent with that of others.

But still, an undistinguishing Good-nature may be full as bad as a partial one. Too often the inconsiderate, or indolent, give themselves up a Prey to whoever lays hold on them. Confident Forwardness prevails upon some: a Talent for entertaining and diverting them takes with others, abject Flattery with a third Sort, and little Officiousnesses, well-chosen and well-timed, with a fourth. By such as excel in these Arts only, they suffer their whole Stock of Beneficence to be exhausted: and never take the Trouble of thinking, how very much better it might be employed: by which Means they at once give the worthy the Un-

easiness of seeing themselves overlooked, and raise the unworthy to a Capacity of doing Harm.

Nay indeed, when they have done Harm, and been guilty of pernicious Crimes, there is a false Tenderness in many, that makes them unwilling to have past Misdemeanors punished, so as may be likely to prevent future ones. They have no Compassion for human Society, and nothing but Compassion for the Disturbers of it. To say the Truth, some will shew a kind Regard to bad Characters, which they will shew to none else: and do more to assist the most profligate Wretches, under the Difficulties and Dangers that their Profligateness hath brought them into, without either Design or Desire of reforming them, than they would to supply the most pitiable Necessities of an innocent Person or Family. Now this preferring such before others, in Acts of Beneficence, is Love of Wickedness, not Humanity. Or, if there be sometimes a Sort of what is called Good-nature in it, it is a false Sort; and one that approaches very near to being directly vicious: as unquestionably some Dispositions are, which in common Speech bear this excellent Name. Such, for Instance, is the yielding Flexibleness, that will

let Men deny nothing to their immoral and imprudent, or perhaps artful Companions, whatever Pain it gives their worthiest and most respectable Friends. Such is the superficial Gaiety, that first invites and deceives others into Sin; then, without the least Concern, abandons them to Ruin. Such, lastly, is the thoughtless and profuse Generosity, that often usurps the Place both of proper Charity and even of Justice: and, by prompting Men to do at some Times immoderately great and kind Things, without Need; reduces them to do, at others, mean and hard, and oppressive Things, contrary to the strongest Obligations.

These wrong Sorts of Good-nature (and, melancholy as the Number of them is, there are still more) should never tempt us to be unreasonably suspicious of others, though vigilant Caution is an essential Part of Wisdom: but they ought surely to put us on a careful and frequent Trial of our own Hearts. Is the Benevolence of Temper and Behaviour, for which we value ourselves, and expect the World to value us, of the right Stamp? Is no Instance of it Ostentation, to catch Applause; or Cunning, to carry Points that we have in View? Are we good to those, who

differ from us in their Way of Thinking, whose Repuation eclipses, whose Competition obstructs us, whose Interest with others is superior to ours? Are we ready to befriend unadorned disagreeable Merit; to bestow private Favours on such as can make us no Return; and exercise bountifully, when Occasion requires, those Kinds of Beneficence to which we are otherwise least addicted? Doth our Kindness to particular Persons flow from, at least is it consistent with, a sincere Concern for the Happiness of all Mankind? Are we truly desirous and active to promote their spiritual and eternal, as well as temporal and present, Welfare? And lastly, are the Demonstrations, that we have given of this excellent Temper, proportionable to the Degree of it which God conferred on us originally, and the Means we have had of improving and exercising it since? For from those, who have enjoyed a greater Share of these, a greater Share of Usefulness in their respective Stations is as much to be expected, as a more plentiful Contribution of Alms from the Rich.

If the foregoing Questions can be well answered, then our Benevolence is a genuine moral Virtue. But still there are Qualifications

of unſpeakable Moment wanting, to exalt it into that Chriſtian Grace, which the Scripture calls Charity: that we place at the Head of all our Motives to it, the Love and Fear of God, producing a Deſire to imitate and obey him: that we humbly plead the Pardon, obtained by his Son, and promiſed in his Goſpel, for the many Imperfections, which a ſerious Review will always diſcover in our beſt Diſpoſitions and Performances: that we earneſtly beg the needful Aid of his holy Spirit, to carry us, in this and every Virtue, beyond the poor inſufficient Lengths, which fallen and unaſſiſted Nature can go. All this God hath enjoined: and thoſe who preſumptuouſly or careleſsly neglect it, he will not, he cannot, accept; how fair an Appearance ſoever they make, in the Eyes of others, or their own.

Having thus explained the Notion of true Chriſtian Charity, or Love to Mankind, I proceed,

II. To ſhew the Value and Advantages of it; firſt to the World in general, then to the charitable themſelves.

The Importance of a ſocial Spirit to the Happineſs of Society, the Neceſſity of mutual Friendlineſs among Creatures ſo mutually dependent,

pendent, of Compaſſion in a World ſo full of Miſery, of a mild forgiving Temper amidſt ſo much Frailty, Thoughtleſſneſs, and Ignorance, need not be proved; and, one ſhould think, cannot eaſily be overlooked. The heavieſt and bittereſt Part of the Sufferings of Life will be found, I believe, on Inquiry, to flow, from Want of Good-will, or Want of Care to ſhew it: and what Felicity then would there riſe from Mens becoming univerſally reaſonable, humane and courteous; attentive to the Intereſts and Inclinations, the Hopes and Fears, the Wants and Sorrows, one of another? But, not to amuſe ourſelves with the vain Expectation of every one acting thus, let each Perſon only think, what beneficial Effects, to thoſe about him, would follow from his own doing it.

Good-nature, though expreſſed but in the ſlighteſt Intercourſes of Life, gives Pleaſure, and encourages right Behaviour ſufficiently to make it worthy of being looked on, even in this loweſt View, as a Duty of great Conſequence. Whatever hath an immediate and continual Influence on the Happineſs of others, be it in ever ſo trifling Inſtances, muſt, on the Whole, have a much greater Influence than we are apt to imagine. Even the leſſer Demonſtrations, therefore, of obliging Conde-

ſcenſion in Superiors, of Reſpectfulneſs and Deference in Inferiors, of Deſire to pleaſe, and Willingneſs to be pleaſed, amongſt Equals, are Matters highly worth regarding; Ways in ſome or other of which we can every one of us be good to all around us: and it is the only Goodneſs that moſt of them want from us.

But no one either needs or ought to confine the Proofs of his Benevolence to ſuch narrow Bounds: but, without ſeeking much for Opportunities of exerciſing it, (an Employment, however, the moſt rational and honourable of all others) will eaſily find no contemptible ones laid in his Way, be his Condition in the World almoſt what it will. Thoſe of diſtinguiſhed Rank, for Inſtance, do the moſt extenſive and important Service to their Fellow-creatures, while they recommend the Practice of Religion, of Virtue, of Prudence, by their Example, and inforce it by their Authority. Perſons engaged in a Life of Buſineſs, have conſiderable and frequent Opportunities of ſhewing valuable Kindneſs to Numbers, at one Time or another, in their reſpective Profeſſions, with little or no Loſs or Trouble to themſelves. They, whom a better Underſtanding, or longer Experience, hath made

made abler Judges of any Branch of Conduct than others, what Opportunities have they of directing the ignorant, warning the thoughtleſs, and ſetting the miſtaken right, where, perhaps, an Error perſiſted in may be fatal to them for ever? Eſpecially if ſuch as are intitled to give Advice, would but ſtudy a little, firſt to make good Counſel agreeable, and afterwards, if there be Occaſion, Repentance eaſy, by receiving Offenders back from wrong Courſes with Tenderneſs, and endeavouring to ſhelter them from hard Cenſures, on Account of the Faults they have once forſaken.

But above moſt others, they, to whom God hath intruſted Riches, have obvious and daily Opportunities of doing Good, by extending Bounty to the poor: under which Name, though all ought to be included, whoſe Circumſtances are too ſtrait for the Station in which they are obliged to appear; yet the loweſt Part of the World hath undoubtedly, in general, by much the ſtrongeſt Title to the Benefit of that Denomination. For the Diſtreſſes of theſe, when helpleſs through Age or Infirmities, or ſunk under the Burden of a numerous Family to feed and cloath, are heavy to a Degree, of which they, who ſee nothing around them

them but Plenty and Chearfulneſs, uſually think little. And yet they are bound to think often and ſeriouſly, that our Maker's Providence hath not permitted ſo great Inequalities of Condition in the human Species, for one Part of them to languiſh in Miſery, and the other to look down with Contempt upon them. *God accepteth not the Perſons of Princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor: for they are all the Work of his Hands*[e]. And his gracious Intention was, that the Virtues of Beneficence on one Hand and Gratitude on the other, ſhould be exerciſed, and the Joy, both of doing and receiving Good, be felt amongſt Men. We are, therefore, none of us, at Liberty, either to with-hold our due Proportion out of Covetouſneſs, or to diſable ourſelves from giving it by Expences of other Kinds. It is true, indeed, even Luxury, by the Multitudes it employs, performs in Part the Work of Charity; for ſo the Wiſdom of Heaven hath ordered Things, that ſuch as will do no Good from right Motives, ſhall do ſome by their very Vices. But then the Good done by luxurious Expenſiveneſs is very unequally done; and to ſuch, for the moſt Part, as need and deſerve it leaſt: beſides that,

e Job xxxiv. 19.

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all the While, it doth infinite Harm both to private and public Virtue and Happineſs. Uſeleſs Profeſſions are increaſed and enriched, while the more neceſſary ones are left deſtitute of Hands, or empoveriſhed by the exorbitant Price of Labour: a ſuperfluous Number, well able to work, are maintained in Idleneſs, and too commonly in Wickedneſs alſo; while true Objects of Compaſſion are left to the ſcanty Allowance of the Law. Beſides, other Evils, abſolutely inſeparable from Luxury, would greatly over-balance the above-mentioned accidental good Conſequences ariſing from it, were they much more conſiderable than they are. It gives, in many Reſpects, a very wrong Turn to the Minds of the great; and excites a moſt pernicious Emulation of their Follies and Sins in thoſe below them: tempts both to ſuch Behaviour, and entangles both in ſuch Difficulties, as have every where proved the final Ruin of all Virtue and all Happineſs public and private. But were it to do no harm at all, and ever ſo much Good; yet who, that indulges himſelf in it, can ſeriouſly ſay he intended that Good; intended any Thing indeed, but the Gratification of his own Vanity and Voluptuouſneſs? Whereas, enjoying one Part of a large Income, with decent

decent Moderation, and diſpoſing of the other in prudent Liberalities, produces Good every Way; may better, both here and to Eternity, the Condition of thoſe who partake of ſuch Bounty; and muſt be beneficial in the higheſt Degree to him, who beſtows it from a Senſe of Duty: which is the ſecond Particular wherein the Value of this Charity was propoſed to be ſhewn.

The wiſe Author of our Beings hath kindly formed us all with a natural Tenderneſs towards each other: which, as it gives us Pain on the ſeeing or hearing of the Miſeries of our Fellow-creatures, unleſs we wickedly harden ourſelves againſt them; ſo it rewards us, when we relieve them, with the ſweeteſt Joy that we are capable of experiencing: a Joy that neither is ſucceeded by uneaſy Reflections, like many others; nor vaniſhes quickly into nothing, like moſt others: but which the Heart dwells upon with laſting Delight and humble Self-approbation. But were this Pleaſure much leſs, than whoever habituates himſelf to it will find it to be, the ſame Goodneſs of Nature, which is the Parent of charitable Beneficence, is alſo the beſt Qualification for enjoying the Satisfactions and moderating the Vexations of ſocial Life: and therefore

therefore we cannot do a more prudent Thing, than to ſtrengthen it by Exerciſe. Beſides, Good-will to others gives us the ſureſt Claim, that any Thing can give, to Good-will in Return; the Proofs of which we may eaſily come to want on many Occaſions. But though the World, and even thoſe Perſons in it whom we have ſerved, recompenſe us ever ſo ill, yet not the ſmalleſt kind Action, that we have either done or deſigned, ſhall be loſt. For God ſees them all; and will be proportionably gracious, not only to the Virtues, but even the Failings of thoſe, who have made it their faithful Care to ſhew the Mercy which they hope to receive.

And this is that never-failing Motive to univerſal Benevolence, which the Text urges: *have fervent Charity among yourſelves: for Charity ſhall cover the Multitude of Sins.* Not that either the outward Acts, or even the inward Temper, of this one Virtue, though it were extended to all our Fellow-creatures, and much leſs if only to ſome ſmall Part of them, nor that perhaps the moſt deſerving, ſhall excuſe the wilful and unrepented Neglect, either of due Reverence to God, or moral Government of ourſelves in other Reſpects. But ſeldom, indeed, will it happen, if at all, that the profane or debauched, let them

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be called the beſt-natured Men that ever were; ſhall do near ſo much Good as Harm in the World, were the whole Conſequences of their Behaviour well computed. But could this be ever ſo much otherwiſe, yet to honour and worſhip our Maker, in the Manner which he hath appointed, is one of our eſſential Obligations, and to obſerve the Rules of Chaſtity and Temperance, Decency and Order, is another. Now what we are bound to obſerve, we cannot poſſibly be left at Liberty to break through or deſpiſe. And therefore *be not deceived: God is not mocked*[f]. Whoever lives in the known and indulgent Tranſgreſſion of any Duty, or Commiſſion of any Sin, whatever Excellencies in other Points he may ſeemingly or really have, ſhall not enter into the Kingdom of God. Great Promiſes are made to other ſingle Virtues, in other Paſſages of Scripture, as well as to Charity in this. And the Meaning is not, that we may get to Heaven by any one good Quality that we pleaſe: for ſurely there will no one be found ſo bad as to have none: but each of them is ſuppoſed, though practiſed more eminently than the reſt, to be accompanied by them; not ſeparated from them, and ſet up againſt them: a

[f] Gal. vi. 7.

Suppoſition

Suppoſition made will ſtill more Reaſon in the preſent Caſe, than any other of the ſame Kind: becauſe the true Love to our Neighbour not only comprehends every good Diſpoſition towards him, but flows from Love to God, and Faith in our bleſſed Redeemer, and dutiful Regard to the Motions of the Holy Spirit. Indeed all theſe united, in the poor Degree that we poſſeſs them, can by no Means merit Pardon for our Failures in all; but only qualify us for obtaining that Mercy which St. *Peter*, in the Beginning of this Epiſtle, aſcribes to *the Sprinkling of the Blood of Jeſus Chriſt*[g]. And nothing leſs than a prevailing Habit of every Virtue will complete our Qualification for final Acceptance: but that of each particular one ſhall contribute towards it, in Proportion to its Value. And as Beneficence, practiſed in its whole Extent on right Principles, is of the higheſt Value, the Text very properly teaches, and was deſigned only to teach, that Charity, Kindneſs to our Fellow-creatures, practiſed from a Principle of Conſcience, in every Way that we have Opportunity, ſhall contribute, in a diſtinguiſhed Manner, to fit us for receiving Forgiveneſs from our Creator, and thus ſhall

[g] 1 Peter i. 2.

cover the Multitude of our *Sins* at the last Day. Since, therefore, being good to our Brethren will give us a peculiar Claim to the Goodness of our heavenly Father: whoever is sensible of his past Offences, let him take this Way especially of evidencing his Repentance; and whoever would intitle himself after Death to the noblest of Rewards, let him serve God throughout Life in this most excellent of all Duties.

SERMON XI.

MATTH. x. 34.

Think not that I am come to send Peace on Earth: I came not to send Peace, but a Sword.

THAT these Words of our blessed Saviour express, not the Design of his appearing in the World, but the Effect it would have very contrary to his Design, through the Wickedness of Men, both his Life and Doctrine sufficiently shew; and, indeed, all Sorts of Men have acknowledged. For though too many Christians have acted as if they understood him to desire what he only foretels, and thought it their Duty to make his Words good: yet none of them, I think, have ever professed to understand him so. And Infidels themselves have done him the Justice of allowing, that he meant to establish Good-will and Virtue among Men. But then his Religion, they say, hath so miserably failed of answering his Purpose, hath produced such dreadful Evils, and been of so exceeding small

Benefit, that they cannot imagine a wiſe and good Being, as God is, would ever take ſuch very extraordinary Methods as the Goſpel aſſerts, to introduce and eſtabliſh it. And though few, it may be hoped, will think it reaſonable to carry the Matter thus far; yet many may be tempted by ſuch confident Affirmations, if not to doubt of the Truth of Chriſtianity, yet to have leſs Delight in it, leſs Thankfulneſs and Zeal for it, than they would otherwiſe have.

We ſhall do well, therefore, to inquire, both how far the Facts alledged in this Objection are true, and whether the Concluſion drawn from them is juſt.

That conſiderable Evils have taken their Riſe from our Saviour's Doctrine, muſt be owned. He himſelf, we ſee, declares they would: and he had Reaſons to declare it in Terms as ſtrong, as the Truth would warrant. For as the *Jews* expected nothing but Peace and Proſperity, for themſelves at leaſt, under their *Meſſiah*, it was both honourable and prudent to give them fair Warning of what was to happen, that they might not firſt be elevated with falſe Hopes and heated into preſumptuous Behaviour, and then complain they had been deceived and miſled. Beſides,

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as he undoubtedly thought the leaſt Degree of Evil a great deal too much, he could not ſpeak ſlightly of that which he foreſaw. But ſtill he could never deſign to ſay, that it would over-balance or go near to equal the Good: for thus he might have diſcredited his own Miſſion, and contradicted the whole Tenour of his own Diſcourſes.

The Allegations, therefore, of the Argument before us cannot be proved from this Text, nor, indeed, from any other. But the whole Proof muſt be drawn from the natural Tendency of Chriſtianity, and the Experience of its Effects. Now it cannot, conſiſtently with common Modeſty, be denied, that the Tendency of Chriſtianity to the Welfare of Mankind is very powerful. Juſtice and Mercy, Obedience to Superiors, Condeſcenſion to Inferiors, mutual Tenderneſs and mutual Uſefulneſs, are the main Precepts that every where occur in it: to theſe peculiarly the Reward of everlaſting Happineſs is annexed; and nothing contrary to them is ever taught throughout the Scripture. It is very true, Pleas have been made from it in Support of Tyranny and Cruelty; but they are ſo abſolutely groundleſs, that Unbelievers themſelves have vindicated our Religion in this Reſpect,

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by charging it on thoſe whom they apprehended to claim exorbitant Powers, that they aſſumed what their own ſacred Books did not give them the leaſt Colour for.

Nor indeed do I remember any Accuſation againſt the Goſpel, as hurtful in its Nature, at all worth Notice, excepting that of the great Streſs it is ſaid to lay on right Belief: from whence, we are told, all who imagine each other to believe amiſs have been prompted to reciprocal Hatred and Perſecution; whereas, the Heathens had no Articles of Faith, and therefore lived in Peace[a]. But indeed every Profeſſion, both of Religion and Irreligion, muſt have ſome Belief to ground itſelf upon: elſe it will be a Profeſſion of Nothing. Deiſts, and even Atheiſts, have their Creed; conſiſting, as they would find upon Inquiry, of much ſtranger Doctrines than ours doth: which alſo they believe to be of vaſt Importance, otherwiſe they would be ſelf-condemned for propagating it. Nay, if we may judge of what many of them would do, by the Spirit they manifeſt in what they ſay: as they inveigh againſt Chriſtianity now both with Bitterneſs and Unfairneſs, they would employ

[a] See Letter to the Miniſter of *Moffat*, p. 7. and the Anſwer to it.

againſt

againſt it, if they had Power, Violence as well as Fraud[b]. Then, as for the Heathens, whoſe Mildneſs in theſe Matters is ſo extolled; both *Jews* and *Chriſtians* had moſt dreadful Experience of their Want of it. Nor were they by any Means totally guiltleſs of religious Quarrels among themſelves. Nor hath the Goſpel given the leaſt Encouragement to ſuch Quarrels by the Faith it requires. So much Faith it muſt require, as may be a Foundation for the Duties it enjoins. But all unneceſſary Speculations it condemns in the fulleſt and ſtrongeſt Terms. Be Mens Faith ever ſo right, it tells them plainly they ſhall never be rewarded, without every Part of a good Life: and be their Faith ever ſo wrong, it neither permits unkind Uſage of them in this World, nor harſh Judgment with Reſpect to another. There are, indeed, awful Denunciations in the Bible, againſt ſuch as corrupt the Goſpel, *turn the Grace of God into Laſciviouſneſs*[c], or abuſe it to patronize any Kind of Immorality. But Nothing ſevere is ever ſaid of well-meaning Perſons that miſtake; nor any Thing more ſevere of bad Men that err in Opinion, than of bad Men that do not. Nor can there be

[b] See *Leland* againſt *Tindal*, Vol. I. p. 302—312. [c] Jude 4.

ſtricter Injunctions againſt any Thing, or inforced with better Arguments, than thoſe of *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles againſt all Sorts of Perſecution. So that had they eſtabliſhed ever ſo many Articles of Faith, and laid ever ſo much Weight upon them, yet as they have certainly laid equal Weight at leaſt on brotherly Love, mutual Forbearance, and univerſal Charity: they can never have authoriſed doing any Harm in the World. And the Religion they taught is confeſſedly fitted to do all the Good in it, which the pureſt Precepts, and the ſtrongeſt Inducements to practiſe them, the moſt regular Care to inſtruct Men, and the moſt friendly Diſcipline to watch over them, are capable of.

Yet ſome, notwithſtanding, will inſiſt, that in Fact it hath done Harm: and againſt Fact there is no arguing. But, in the Nature of Things, Nothing can do what it hath no Manner of Tendency to do. Chriſtianity therefore may have been the Pretence, may have been the Occaſion, of Evil; but the Cauſe it cannot. However, let us inquire, what the Proof is of its having any Way occaſioned near ſo much Harm, as it hath directly produced Good. We readily confeſs, a long Catalogue may with Eaſe be given of the Sins and Sufferings that have

followed

followed its Appearance and Eſtabliſhment. In the firſt Place, its Profeſſors underwent grievous Perſecutions from the reſt of Mankind. But evidently this is no more to be charged upon Chriſtianity, than the Injuries which the wicked have often done to the good, on Account of their Goodneſs, are to be charged on moral Virtue. In the next Place, the *Jews*, having offended God by their inhuman Treatment of the Goſpel, were permitted, by his juſt Providence, to turn the ſame bitter Spirit againſt each other, and againſt the *Romans*, and ſo to bring on themſelves utter Deſtruction. But here alſo Chriſtianity is perfectly clear, unleſs it be an innocent Man's Fault, that a Criminal is puniſhed for having robbed or murdered him. And theſe Things it probably was that our Saviour had chiefly in View, when he ſpoke in the Text of *a Sword* to be *ſent on the Earth*; or, as, perhaps, it ſhould be tranſlated, *on the Land*, the Country of *Judæa*.

But, we muſt acknowledge farther, Diſcord and Diviſions prevailed very ſoon among Chriſtians alſo, and produced lamentable Effects: till they came at Length to exerciſe Barbarities one towards another, equal to any they had ſuffered from Infidels. But then it ought to be allowed

us in Return, that though unjuſt ſpiritual Cenſures began even in the ſecond Century, and the lower Degrees of temporal Perſecution, ſuch as Baniſhment and Confiſcation, in the fourth, very ſoon after they had Power: yet the utmoſt Extremities were introduced much later, nor did they receive the formal Sanction of the ſupreme Authority, till many Ages after. I believe Twelve Hundred Years had paſſed, before any Law was made in any Chriſtian State for putting Men to Death on Account of erroneous Faith. Since that Time, indeed, moſt ſhocking Tragedies have been acted by a wicked Zeal for Religion. But then many, that have ſeemed to proceed from that Cauſe, were but the real Truth known, would in all Likelihood be found, and indeed often have been found, to proceed from quite other Motives. Intereſts and Reſentments have been covered perpetually with a Maſk of Piety. Zealots have often been only the Inſtruments of Parties, while they ſeemed to be their Directors; and the Miſchief, done in the Name of God, would have been as certainly done without it under ſome other Pretence, if that had not offered itſelf. Religion is a ſpecious Plea; and therefore was uſed whenever it could. but any Plea will ſerve

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for what Men are bent to do. And if the Mifchiefs that have been difguifed under a Form of Godlinefs, could not in fome Cafes have been fo eafily or fo effectually accomplifhed elfe: yet the Whole of them ought not to be attributed even to the Pretence of Piety: but only fo much as would not have happened, had not that been ufed. Religious Animofities, religious Wars, have been frequent and dreadful. But can we imagine, that if thefe had been avoided, no others would have arifen, during all the Time that they have filled? Such a Notion would argue ftrange Ignorance of human Nature. So that in Ages when the World hath appeared to fuffer very much from the Abufes of Religion, it may indeed have fuffered, very little from them. And of what it hath fuffered, one great Part may have proceeded, not from the Bigotry of Believers, but the Artifices of fuch as were inwardly Unbelievers.

But befides the Evil of Difcord, Chriftianity hath been accufed of obftructing Knowledge, and promoting Ignorance in the World[d]. But in what Condition was the World before Chriftianity? Did not the groffeft Ignorance,

[d] That Chriftianity hath not been hurt by the Increafe of Knowledge, fee Warburton, Vol. II. Serm. xv.

about

about Matters of the higheſt Importance to Men, prevail almoſt every where, even in the politeſt and beſt inſtructed Nations? And if the ſucceeding Times were not learned, what elſe could be expected; when the *Roman* Empire, debaſed and ſunk under Tyranny and Luxury before it received the Goſpel, was ſoon after diſſolved by that Inundation of Barbarians that overſpread *Europe* with War and Deſolation? By theſe Heathens it was that Arts and Sciences were brought ſo low. What remained of Learning, remained among Chriſtians: and as they became Chriſtians, they ſhared in it. Little was left indeed. But had it not been for the Profeſſors, and particularly the Teachers of this Religion, to which ſome would impute all the Darkneſs of the middle Ages, every Monument of ancient Days muſt probably have been loſt[e]. Chriſtians they were too, and principally Clergymen, that have reſtored and improved Learning ſince; and the Chriſtian World is at this Day the Seat of it. Nor will the Unbelievers amongſt us, I am perſuaded, pretend, that what they have contributed to make it ſo, is at all material in Compariſon, or preſume to mention

[e] The religious Orders eſtabliſhed in the 11th Century, revived Learning in the 12th. See *Journ. des Sç.* July, 1744. p. 317.

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the Names of their few and arrogant Leaders in Competition with the Multitudes of truly great Men, who have adorned the Faith of *Christ* by their distinguished Excellence in every Branch of Philosophy and Literature. Indeed Learning is of such eminent Service, both to the Understanding and the Proof of our Religion, that we must of Necessity support it. And accordingly, more are bred up to Learning with a View of being dedicated to the Ministry of the Gospel, than with any other whatever. Few of them, in Proportion, we own, make great Improvements: but few in any Profession do. And preserving thus, though it be but a moderate Degree of Knowledge, amongst Men, cannot fail to be exceedingly useful; especially of that Knowledge which immediately relates to their moral Conduct. But were Infidelity once to prevail, the chief Inducements to all Applications of this Sort would cease: scarce any one would take the Pains to learn, what it would be no one's particular Duty to teach; worldly Pursuits and sensual Indulgences, having little to check them, would almost wholly ingross the Attention of Mankind; and produce not only a Neglect, but a Contempt, of more liberal

liberal Studies; as I fear we have begun to experience already.

But we ſhall be told, that how little Harm, or how much Service ſoever, Chriſtianity may have done to Learning; it hath contributed nothing to the Virtue or Happineſs of Mankind, and therefore cannot be a Religion worthy of God. Now, on the contrary, we apprehend, it hath contributed to both theſe very greatly: and it ſeems the Extremity of Unreaſonableneſs to ſay, that, in Spite of all its Precepts, Promiſes and Threatenings, it can make Multitudes bad, and yet by th eForce of them all can make no one good. There is viſibly no Poſſibility that either better Rules of Life ſhould be given, or more intereſting Motives to obſerve them, than the Goſpel hath given. It muſt therefore reform thoſe, whom any Doctrine can: and the only Objection againſt it on this Head muſt be, that it doth not reform thoſe whom no Doctrine can.

Still it will be ſaid; look into the Hiſtory of Chriſtian Nations, into that of the Chriſtian Clergy in particular; and what will you find, but the ſame wrong Inclinations and wrong Behaviour, in at leaſt the ſame Degree as amongſt other Men? And it muſt be owned,

owned, the Profeſſors of the Goſpel in general, but the Miniſters of it above all, (becauſe, though on the Whole we have by no Means been worſe, yet we ought to have been far better than the reſt) have much Cauſe to be humble before God and the World for the Diſhonour we have done by our Negligence, our Senſuality, our Haughtineſs, our Ambition, our Covetouſneſs, our Unfairneſs, our Bitterneſs, to the worthy and holy Name whereby we are called. But as to the Degree of theſe Faults, it ſhould be obſerved, that if Sins and Follies make the chief Figure in Chriſtian Hiſtories, ſo they do and muſt in all Hiſtories. Virtuous and quiet Times, be they ever ſo long, virtuous and quiet Men, be they ever ſo many, furniſh uſually but ſlender Materials for a Narration, and fill up but a ſmall Space in it[f]; whereas great Notice is taken of the bad Things that are done in the World, partly from a natural Diſlike of Wickedneſs, partly from perſonal Hatred to ſome of thoſe who commit it, and partly alſo from the Pleaſure Men have in framing Compariſons advantageous to themſelves. But eſpecially the Failings of ſuch as lie under

[f] Ειρηνης γαρ ουσης, ὑποθεσιν οἱ ἱϛοριογραφειν εθελοντες ουχ᾽ ἑξουσιν. επει και ἡμεις—ουκ αν ηυπορησαμεν ὑποθεσεως, ει οἱ φιλουντες τας ϛασεις ἡσυχαζειν προυηρουντο. Socr. Hiſt. Eccl. in fine.

peculiar

peculiar Obligations of being pious and exemplary, will always be ſeen in the very ſtrongeſt Light, and Blame thrown upon them beyond all Proportion, when they act amiſs. But when Men act well, and Things go on right, very little is ſaid. The Good do not proclaim their own Goodneſs: and the World is ſeldom very inquiſitive about it; hath other Matters to mind; thinks at the moſt they do but their Duty, and is much apter to ſeek for, and imagine Faults, than to own and remember Virtues.

In the primitive Times, when few were tempted to profeſs the Faith of *Chriſt* but ſuch as embraced it in Earneſt, and his Diſciples were eaſily diſtinguiſhed from the reſt of Mankind, the Fruits of the Goſpel bore a moſt convincing Teſtimony in its Favour. But when once the Profeſſion grew general, and profitable: when real and pretended Chriſtians were mixed together, and the virtuous hid amongſt the immoral, no Wonder if then the Benefit was leſs remarkable. The whole promiſcuous Collection going all under one Name, and many of them ſeeming but little the better for their Faith, both partial and careleſs Obſervers have haſtily concluded that few or none are the better at all. And

yet,

yet, there are great Numbers on the Whole, much greater than either the profane are ready to think, or even the pious have commonly the Means of knowing, whose Hearts and Lives their Belief hath wonderfully amended: some of good Dispositions raised by it to eminent Goodness: others of bad Dispositions excited to resist them effectually. And how much the Influence of religious Principles and religious Persons, whom our Saviour calls the *Salt of the Earth*[g], may contribute to preserve even the bad part of Mankind from utter Corruption and Dissolution, is not perhaps often sufficiently considered.

But were it true, though it neither is nor can be, that the virtuous would be equally virtuous without the Precepts, without the Promises, without the Grace of the Gospel: yet there is no Pretence, that they would be equally happy too. For the Christian Doctrine is adapted throughout in the highest Degree to support them under the Difficulties of Duty, and the Afflictions of Life, by such Assurances, as Reason unassisted can never give, that God will pardon, strengthen, and reward them, both here and to Eternity. Possibly to some this may seem at present a

[g] Matth. v. 13.

ſmall Matter. But there will come a Time, may it come before it be too late! when they will be ſenſible, that theſe are the moſt important of all Things.

It muſt not be objected, that Believers in the Goſpel are often full of Doubts and Terrors. For Believers in Natural Religion alone have infinitely more Cauſe for them, as both their Rule and their Hopes are infinitely more obſcure. Nor muſt it be argued, that if Chriſtianity adds to the Happineſs of the virtuous here, it adds alſo to the Uneaſineſs of the vicious: for they ought to be uneaſy for the World's Sake and their own. It may force them to grow better; if not, it may reſtrain them from growing worſe: at leaſt, ſooner or later, it may bring them back, in Part if not wholly; and thus prevent an unknown Quantity of Evils, which elſe they would ſuffer, and make thoſe around them ſuffer. So that, indeed, no one Perſon, where the Goſpel is at all underſtood, can well fail to be in ſome Reſpect a Gainer by it. And be its good Influence ever ſo ſmall on each ſingly, yet the Sum total muſt be very large. It is ſoon ſaid in an angry Mood, that, Religion doth no Good; for the World cannot be worſe that it is. But conſi-

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der a little what the Face of Things would be, were the forming Hand of Chriſtian Education to ceaſe from its Work, and the continual Warnings of Chriſtian Inſtruction to be laid aſide. Nothing could be ſubſtituted comparable to them: Nothing would be ſubſtituted at all. Attempts for it, if they were made, which probably they might not be in Haſte, would be diſunited and inconſiſtent, diſregarded and ſucceſsleſs: all Perſons would be left in a great Meaſure, and the lower and larger Part intirely, to the Guidance of Appetites and Paſſions grown up wild, with a very poor Mixture of a Reaſon uninformed, and more likely to be ſubſervient and do Miſchief, than govern and do good.

Nor have they alone, who profeſs Chriſtianity, been made wiſer and better by it, but others alſo. The chief Part of what is valuable in the *Mahometan* Religion, which hath ſpread exceedingly wide, is probably derived from the Old and New Teſtament. And certainly the Unbelievers amongſt ourſelves, who would fain repreſent Revelation as uſeleſs, have, notwithſtanding, borrowed from it thoſe rational Notions of Piety and Virtue, which they pretend to be the natural Growth of their own Underſtandings. For few or none of the moſt

 learned

learned of their Heathen Predeceſſors had them: but ſcarce the moſt ignorant of their Chriſtian Contemporaries are without them.

Nor ſhould we conſider only what Good the Goſpel hath done in other Reſpects, but how much Superſtition particularly it hath extinguiſhed or prevented. The Superſtitions it hath occaſioned, we are continually told of: but many ſeem to have forgot thoſe it found in the World; the moſt abſurd and abject, the moſt expenſive and troubleſome, the moſt immoral and barbarous, that could be. And none were more cruel, or upheld by a more dreadful Church-tyranny, than thoſe of the *Druids* in this Nation. Now who can ſay, how long any of theſe might have continued; who can ſay, how much worſe they might have become, and have been at this Day, if Chriſtianity had not rooted them out? The very groſſeſt Corruptions of it, afterwards, were not quite ſo bad as thoſe preceding Enormities. Beſides, in many Countries, but in none more completely than our own, the Reformation of it hath driven out thoſe Abuſes, which the Perverſion of it brought in: and it continually bears Teſtimony againſt them, wherever the Scripture is freely read. Superſtition is by no Means

Means an Effect of Religion, but a natural Weakneſs in the human Mind, to which it may be greatly ſubject even without Religion. The Goſpel was intended to deſtroy it: the Clergy are intended for a ſtanding Guard againſt it: and though too much of it ſtill prevails among Chriſtians, yet very much more prevails in all the reſt of the World.

Taking therefore into our View the whole Benefit of the Scripture-revelation, both what it hath effected, and what it hath hindered: had it been the Pretence or the Occaſion for all the Harm that is alledged, it may yet have been the direct Cauſe of unſpeakably more Good; and Nothing can be unfairer, than attending only to one Side of the Account, inſtead of both. Indeed to ſtate both exactly, or make any Balance approaching towards Accuracy, is utterly impoſſible, where ſo vaſt a Number of Things and Circumſtances, through ſo large a Part of the World and ſo long a Succeſſion of Ages, muſt come in before a Judgment can be formed. Every one may aſſert as boldly as he will to the Diſadvantage of Chriſtianity. But to prove the Aſſertion from Fact muſt be inſuperably difficult. And when Facts cannot be ſufficiently aſcertained

and compared, the Presumption will always be a very just and strong one, that every Thing hath produced those Effects chiefly, which its natural Tendency fits it to produce. Now the good Tendency of Christianity no candid and considerate Reasoner will ever dispute.

But one Objection farther hath been raised, that how difficult soever it may be to judge of a Series of past Times, yet the Consequences of introducing the Gospel into Heathen Nations in our own Times may be judged of: and we have imparted it to none, but we have made them worse than we found them. Now supposing this dreadful Imputation true, is it by teaching them our Religion, that we have corrupted them, or by teaching them Sins absolutely inconsistent with our Religion? Had they learned our Christianity without our Debauchery, which is surely no Part of it, their Condition had been infinitely better than it was before: and had they learned our Debauchery without our Christianity, it had been still worse than it is now.

Nor doth this Observation hold with Respect to them only, but ourselves too. We compare the present Christian Times, in which numberless Incentives to Luxury and all Manner of Wicked-

Wickedneſs abound, with the ancient Heathen ones, when the Poverty and Simplicity of their Manner of Life ſecured them from adding artificial, to their natural, Vices: and in whatever we find or imagine ourſelves worſe than them, we aſcribe it to our Religion. Whereas the true Method of comparing is, to take a luxurious Heathen Nation; *Rome* under its Emperors for Inſtance; and a luxurious Chriſtian one; and then ſee where Crimes will appear to be moſt general, and carried fartheſt: only making due Allowance for one Thing, that the Sins and Follies we are offended at in our own Age, will look greater, becauſe they are preſent; and yet the Virtues of thoſe we live amongſt will ſeem leſs, becauſe Love to ourſelves will tempt us to depreciate thoſe, with whom we ſhall be moſt compared.

But ſuppoſing it ever ſo queſtionable, what Good, or ever ſo clear what Harm, hath proceeded from Chriſtianity; how are we juſtified in doubting on that Account, whether its Origin be from God? Think only of how little Benefit Reaſon hath been to a great Part of Mankind: how much Uneaſineſs it hath cauſed, by enabling them to reflect on their own Diſadvantages, Dangers, and Sufferings;

how much Mischief it hath brought to pass, by qualifying them to contrive and execute ill Designs against each other; how much wiser and better many Brutes are, than many Men: yet doth not Reason proceed from God? Again, what innumerable Evils in all Ages and Countries, have civil Governors been the Authors of? The Abuses of Christianity cannot have produced so much Evil, as the Abuses of temporal Power, because they have not extended near so far. Yet is not Society and civil Government from God? Indeed if Nothing could be from him, but what in the Event is an Advantage to us; we must deny that the very Being of many Persons is derived from him: for too many doubtless had better never have been. The Good, which he intends absolutely and unconditionally, Nothing can hinder: but where he intends only to afford Men the Means of being happy if they will, he must leave it in their Choice to be otherwise: and what he doth for them, is not the less worthy of him, because they are so unworthy, as to despise or turn it against themselves. For never sure was it made an Argument against the Value of a Medicine, that they who neglect to take it, or who mix Poison with

with it, are not the better for it. Whoever will give Religion Leave to do him Good, will always be an Evidence of its Uſefulneſs. And it is extremely hard, to have thoſe alledge againſt us that there are but few ſuch, who are continually endeavouring that there may be none; and impute that Wickedneſs of the World to the Want of Efficacy in Chriſtianity, which is ſo very much owing to their own profane Diſcourſe and licentious Examples.

But farther: the Goſpel-ſcheme is not completed yet; and the Good it hath not done, it may do ſtill. It hath ſubſiſted indeed a Number of Years, that ſeems a large one, and ſufficient to ſhew whatever is to be expected from it. But large and ſmall are comparative Terms: and what Proportion its Duration hitherto may bear to that which it hath to come, or how differently the Power of God may be exerted in its Favour hereafter from what it is now, we none of us know. But this we know certainly, that the original Books in which it is contained, publiſhed at its firſt Appearance, foretold both its paſt and preſent Corruptions, and its future Purity and univerſal happy Fruits. The former of theſe Predictions, that Chriſtianity ſhould be made an

Inſtrument of Tyranny and Superſtition, Bloodſhed and Diſſoluteneſs, was a very amazing one: a Thing which neither any Sagacity could have foreſeen, nor any Enthuſiaſt have believed; nor any Impoſtor would have declared, if he had believed it. And therefore the Fact, joined with the Prophecy of it, far from an Objection, is a Proof of our Religion; and ſhews us to be in the Midſt of an Event; the melancholy Part of which having been ſo remarkably ſignified to us before-hand, we ought by no Means to judge of what will follow as we ſhould in a common Caſe; but firmly believe, that as *the Myſtery of Iniquity*[h] hath been revealed, *the Myſtery of God*[i] ſhall be accompliſhed likewiſe, and Truth and Virtue reign on this Earth.

But then let us remember, that full enough hath been done to verify the firſt Set of Predictions; and it is high Time we ſhould begin to make good the latter. That Chriſt hath *ſent a Sword on Earth*, no one doubts: let it now be our Care to ſhew him in a more amiable Light, as the *Prince of Peace*. We have ſufficiently made the *Goſpel miniſter to Sin*: let us at laſt bring forth *Fruit by it unto Holineſs*.

[h] 2 Theſſ. ii. 7. [i] Rev. x. 7.

Then

Then we ſhall bear in our own Breaſts the ſureſt, the happieſt, the only beneficial Proof of its Efficacy; and *have our Converſation* ſuch amongſt Unbelievers, that *whereas they* now *ſpeak againſt us as Evil-doers,* and againſt our Religion itſelf for our Sakes, *they may by our good Works, which they ſhall behold, glorify God*[k]: thus bringing forward that bleſſed Time, when *the Wolf ſhall dwell with the Lamb, and the Leopard lie down with the Kid; when they ſhall not hurt nor deſtroy in all his holy Mountain: for the Earth ſhall be full of the Knowledge of the Lord, as the Waters cover the Sea*[l].

Yet even this joyful Scene will be only a faint Shadow of that eternal State of Bliſs, to which is reſerved the complete Vindication of the Benefits of Chriſtianity: and in which, however the preſent World were to go on, they muſt appear with irreſiſtible Evidence, when the *Righteous ſhall ſhine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father*[m], *when God ſhall wipe away all Tears from their Eyes, and there ſhall be no more Death, neither Sorrow nor Crying, neither ſhall there be any more Pain*[n].

[k] 1 Pet. ii. 12
[l] Iſaiah xi. 6, 9.
[m] Matth. xiii. 43.
[n] Rev. xxi. 4.

SERMON XII.

ISAIAH i. 16, 17.

—Cease to do Evil, learn to do well—

THE Order, in which these Words are placed, was evidently designed to teach us, that the Foundation of acting right is avoiding every Thing wrong. Several other Parts of Scripture lay down the same Rule in almost the same Terms[a]: and many express, or imply, the same Doctrine; putting Repentance before Faith and Obedience[b]. Even Heathen Authors, in very distant Ages and Countries, have given the like Direction[c]. And indeed

[a] Psal. xxxiv. 14. xxxvii. 27. Amos v. 15. Rom. xii. 9. 1 Pet. iii. 11.

[b] Matth. xxi. 32. Mark i. 15. Acts xx. 21, Tit. ii. 12, 13.

[c] Θεραπευει και πολιζει [ἡ παιδεια] τη καθαρτικη δυναμει· ειθ' ὁταν καθαρθωσιν, ὑτως αυτους εισαγει προς τας αρετας, κ. τ. λ. Ceb. Tab. p. 35. Ed. Salm. Sapientia prima est Stultitia caruisse. Hor. Epist. i. 1. Τους αρχομενους απο μοχθηροτερας αγωγης επι καλλιονα μεταβαινειν χρη πρωτον εξεμειν τον της κακοζωιας ιον, και τοτε τοις της ευζωιας αγαθοις τρεφεσθαι.—Η γαρ προϋπαρχουσα μοχθηρια τα προσιοντα χρηστα διαφθειρει·—ὡστε ἡ ταξις απαιτει της ευαγωγας καταδοχην. Simpl. in Epict. c. 6.

every

every one must own the Justness of it: but still very few appear to perceive or attend sufficiently to its Importance: which, therefore I shall endeavour to shew you,

I. More briefly, in Respect of our Conduct in general:

II. More at large, in Respect of our Behaviour to each other.

I. In Respect of our Conduct in general.

It is plainly the natural and rational Method, to begin with removing what else will obstruct our Progress, and to make Unity within our own Breasts our earnest Care. He who hath only consistent Pursuits may follow them with a Prospect of Success: but a Mind, divided and distracted between contrary Principles of Action, can hope for Nothing, but to be drawn backward and forward by them continually, as they chance to prevail in their Turns. Things, indeed, that do but accidentally give some little Hindrance to each other now and then, may be prosecuted together, and the due Preference, when they interfere, be adjusted well enough. But Sin and Duty are so essentially opposite, that their Interests can never be reconciled. They flow from different Motives, proceed by different Means, aim at different Ends, and thwart one another perpetually.

petually. And it is to Men's overlooking this obvious Truth, that the Miſcarriage of their good Intentions, the Irreſolution of their Lives, the Incoherence of their Characters, in a great Meaſure, owes its Riſe. Every one of us knows, in the main, what he ought to do: every one feels an Approbation of it; and ſo far, at leaſt, a Diſpoſition to it. But then he feels alſo Diſpoſitions quite adverſe: and though he ſees them to be unwarrantable, yet it is painful to root them out, and not pleaſing even to take Notice of them. So, to avoid Trouble, both Sorts are allowed to grow up together as they can; and which will thrive faſter, ſoon appears. The Soil, corrupt Nature, is by far the moſt inclined to Weeds: they ſprout up without Number and choak the good Seed. Perhaps but one or two Sorts of Wickedneſs were intended to be indulged: but theſe have unforeſeen Connections with others, and thoſe with more. Or, had they none, when Men have once yielded to do but a ſingle Thing amiſs, they have no firm Ground to ſtand upon in refuſing to do a ſecond, and a third: ſo gradually they loſe their Strength, God withdraws his Help, and they fall from bad to worſe. Often this ends in their preſent worldly Ruin. But if they

eſcape

escape it, nay, if they escape growing continually more wicked, still they are incapable of that delightful Consciousness which arises from uniform Integrity of Heart; they can have no true Peace, while Vices are struggling in their Breast with one another, as well a with Virtue; they condemn, they lament themselves: they make earnest Resolutions to reform in this and that Point; but making none to reform in all, they relapse, and go on as they did before. Many of them try hard, and no Wonder, to get Opinions that will quiet them in their Practices: amongst which one of the most prevalant is, the Notion of compensating by good Deeds for evil. But how can our best Actions possibly make Amends for our Sins, when they are only *our Duty*[d], though we had never sinned? Or if any one doth bring himself to believe this; in Proportion as he becomes more easy, he will become more profligate. He will think himself at Liberty to commit any Crime he pleases, provided he doth but intend to give God such or such Satisfaction for it, which, perhaps, he will afterwards forget, or invent some Pretence to omit. But if he doth not, as they that run these Lengths

d Luke xvii. 10.

quickly

quickly come to value their good Deeds at as high, and their ill at as low, a Rate, as they have a Mind; they commonly reckon a very little of the former equivalent to a great deal of the latter. And if they are but noted for any single Inſtance of Obedience, it gives them Vanity enough to eſteem themſelves not only ſafe, but highly in the Divine Favour, let them diſobey in ever ſo many: perhaps it dazzles and blinds them ſo, that they ſcarcely perceive their own Failures in any, or ſcarcely imagine them worth regarding. Nay, ſometimes Acts of mere Superſtition and Folly, indeed of Wickedneſs too under a thin Diſguiſe of Religion, have been all the Atonement offered to Heaven for an ill-ſpent Life, and have been deemed a moſt meritorious one. But will God accept even a real Part of what we owe him, when paid with Deſign to cheat him of the reſt? His Nature, his Word, plainly tell us the contrary. He is holy, and requires univerſal Holineſs. He hath warned us, that *no man can ſerve two Maſters*[e]: and that *whoſoever ſhall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all*[f]. Such, therefore, only, as are careful to do every Thing which they ought,

[e] Matth. vi. 24. [f] James ii. 10.

and

and are ſenſible, that when they have done all, they *are unprofitable Servants*[g], intitled to Acceptance only for the Sake of a gracious Redeemer's Merits, have cauſe to hope well. Others *build on the Sand*, but they *on a Rock*[h]. Their Superſtructure will ſtand firm againſt Storms and may be ſafely raiſed to the greateſt Heights. God will pardon their Infirmities, and aſſiſt their Endeavours: they will of Courſe be making a continual Progreſs, and for every Step of it will receive a proportionable Reward, probably here, certainly hereafter. In ſhort, let Men deviſe what Methods they will, there is but one effectual: *keep Innocency and take Heed unto the Thing that is right: for that ſhall bring a Man Peace at the laſt*[i].

But though avoiding to do Evil through the Whole of our Conduct is requiſite, if ever we would do well: yet in the Text, by what precedes and follows, the Prophet ſeems to have intended it peculiarly as a Direction for our ſocial Conduct: where, indeed, we ſhall find it peculiarly neceſſary, when we conſider,

II. The Importance of behaving inoffenſively to each other.

[g] Luke xvii. 10. [h] Matth. vii. 24—27. [i] Pſal. xxxvii. 38.

It

It is a remarkable Thing in the Conſtitution of this World, that we have much more Power of producing Miſery in it than Happineſs. Every one, down to the moſt inſignificant, is capable of giving Uneaſineſs and Diſquiet, nay, grievous Pain and Affliction to others, and often to great Numbers, without the leaſt Difficulty; while even thoſe of ſuperior Abilities in every Way, can hardly diſcover the Means, unleſs it be within a very narrow Compaſs now and then, of doing any great Good, or communicating any conſiderable Pleaſure. Beſides, the Effects of Kindneſſes may always be intirely loſt: but thoſe of Injuries too frequently can never be remedied. And therefore we ought to watch over ourſelves with perpetual Care, examine the Tendency of all our Words and Actions, and, not contented with meaning no Harm, be ſolicitous to do none. The Harm that we do through Heedleſneſs is certainly not ſo criminal, as if it were purpoſely contrived: but may be almoſt, if not quite, as ſeverely felt notwithſtanding: or though it were but ſlightly, why ſhould we be ſo inadvertent, as unneceſſarily to cauſe but an Hour's, nay, a Moment's, Vexation or Grief to one of our Brethren; or deprive him of the ſmalleſt of thoſe

innocent Gratifications, that help to alleviate the Sorrows of Life, and make the Paſſage through it comfortable? The little we enjoy of Good, is, with Reaſon, very precious to us: and we have a Right to expect, that others ſhould take the Trouble of ſome moderate Caution, not to trample upon and deſtroy it. Human Happineſs is a tender Plant, which every rude Breath is ſufficient to blaſt: and all have ſo quick a Senſe, and moſt Men ſo warm a Reſentment of any Thing done, though innocently, againſt their Intereſts or Inclinations, that they ought by no Means to be indifferent about thoſe of any one elſe. Yet how often are not only ſmaller Inconveniences, but heavy Sufferings, brought from very trifling or very bad Motives, on ſuch as did not deſerve them! Some, under Colour of the tendereſt Affection, ſeduce inconſiderate Creatures, who, but for them, would never have thought of doing amiſs, into Guilt and Wretchedneſs, merely to gratify a brutal Appetite, or gain empty Applauſe from Fellow-libertines. Others tempt their Acquaintance, by fallacious Arguments and bad Examples, to Imprudence, Extravagance, Intemperance, Impiety. A third Sort entertain themſelves, and their ill-choſen Friends, by expoſing

exposing to Scorn, or disquieting with Vexation, just whomsoever their Fancy points out to them: often the very Persons whom they ought to respect the most. And the Authors of all these Distresses can raise themselves Diversion even from reflecting upon them afterwards; and, by doing Mischief with so much Good-humour, appear in the Eyes of the World, and in their own, to be very far from ill-natured. And, it may be, on some occasions they are not such: it may be, they have not, on any, deliberately purposed to be such. But still the Fruits of indulging either sensual Desires, or even Vanity and idle Gaiety, without Regard to Consequences, may be as bitter as those of the keenest Malice. Nay, indeed the disguised smiling Enemy is the more dangerous, as he is unsuspected; and the more wicked, as he is unprovoked.

But Men of more stayed and thoughtful Characters venture also too commonly on dreadful Ill-treatment of others, and yet make a Shift to think well of themselves: not only *withhold Good from him to whom it is due, when it is in the Power of their Hand to do it*[k], but prey upon their Neighbours by Oppres-

[k] Prov. iii. 27.

 sion

ſion and Fraud, *grind the Face of the Poor*[l], take Advantage of the Neceſſity or Ignorance of thoſe with whom they are concerned; exact, without Regard to Equity, whatever they can legally demand; and imagine it very eaſy to procure a Diſpenſation for all this, if they need any. Some have attempted it by voluntary Mortifications and Abſtinence. But *the Faſt which God hath choſen, is to looſe the Bands of Wickedneſs, to undo the heavy Burdens, and let the oppreſſed go free*[m]. Some by Acts of Devotion: but *he that turneth away his Ear from hearing the Law, even his Prayer ſhall be Abomination*[n]. Some by Liberalities to pious or charitable Uſes: but God himſelf hath told us: *I the Lord love Judgment, I hate Robbery for Burnt-offering*[o]. He expects Reſtitution to the injured, not Bounty to other Purpoſes, inſtead of it: much leſs indiſcreet Generoſities to the undeſerving, or expenſive Acts of Vanity and Voluptuouſneſs, under Pretence of encouraging Trade and Labour; which many ſeem to think an abundant Counterbalance to ever ſo much Deceit and Rapine, as well as Debauchery and Irreligion.

[l] Iſaiah iii. 15.
[m] Iſaiah lviii. 6.
[n] Prov. xxviii. 8.
[o] Iſaiah lxi. 8.

There

There is yet a third Sort, who, valuing themſelves highly on their Sobriety and Honeſty, conceive their Diſreſpect to Superiors, their Contempt of Inferiors, their Want of Courteſy to Equals, their cauſeleſs or immoderate Anger, their Evil-ſpeaking and Uncharitableneſs, to be ſmall Sins, or none. Yet ſurely, if any Thing be our own, the Enjoyment of our Lives and Characters in Peace and Quiet, unmoleſted by rude Inſults, malicious or peeviſh Reſentments, unjuſt Aſperſions, is our moſt valuable Property, and taking it away from us, one of the worſt Kinds of Cruelty.

Were it ever ſo poſſible to do equal Good, in Return for the Harm done in one or other of theſe Ways: what Right hath any one to play thus with the moſt ſerious Intereſts of his Fellow-creatures; to commit Injuries firſt, then make Amends for them, when and how he thinks fit? If it be to a different Perſon, the Sufferer is not in the leaſt the better for that. If it be to the ſame, ſtill what Amends can there be made for ſeducing, impoveriſhing, blackening, breaking the Spirits of, another? Happineſs in this World is not felt like Miſery: and one poor Creature, treated in any Reſpect unmercifully, may ſoon undergo much more,

than Numbers, kindly uſed, or plentifully provided for, will ever enjoy.

Surely then to refrain from doing Harm is a very important Duty: and no Requeſt can be juſter for one of us to make to another, than that if we may not hope for any of thoſe Acts of poſitive Goodneſs from him, which yet human Nature and Circumſtances frequently call for, he would, however, abſtain from hurting us; and allow us the undiſturbed Poſſeſſion of whatever we have Cauſe to think valuable, and he hath nothing to do with. In other Things commanded, there may be frequently ſome Room for a Plea of Ignorance or Doubt: in this hardly ever. The weakeſt and dulleſt of us can eaſily perceive, when we ſuffer Injuries: now it is not a Whit more difficult, only we have leſs Inclination, to obſerve when we are guilty of them: and therefore we have no Excuſe for it. When Men are exhorted to Deeds of Charity and Beneficence, they can find a thouſand Reaſons againſt complying: their Ability is ſmall, or the Calls upon them are many; or they cannot ſee, that they are bound to give more Alms than they do already; or they have not Time or Convenience for inquiring into Caſes; or, if one be recommended to them, it

may

may be partially repreſented; or the Care of it belongs rather to ſuch and ſuch, than to them: and numberleſs Evaſions beſides, by which an unwilling Heart betrays, while it ſtudies to conceal, itſelf. But were they to be allowed every Allegation, that Scrupulouſneſs of being too good can ſuggeſt to them: at leaſt their Warineſs and Caution ſhould incline them to be equally ſcrupulous on the other Side. To do no Wrong, they certainly have in their Power; and they owe it to every one; and the Limits of this Obligation have no ſuch great Obſcurity, but that all the World will ſee, whether they exceed them or not. If, therefore, they will ſhew a right Diſpoſition in, what is undoubtedly in their Power, being conſcientiouſly inoffenſive; then it may be credible, but not elſe, that they would ſhew it in more Things, were they able.

And, ſtrange as it may appear to ſpeak of what ſeems a mere negative Quality, as a real Good: yet ſcarce any Words are ſtrong enough to expreſs, how much Good bare Ceſſation from doing Evil would produce. Conſider only, how the World groans under the various Sufferings, which we bring upon each other: ſo various, that it is in vain to think of repreſent-

ing to one's ſelf, in how many Ways the Lives, Healths, Fortunes, Reputation, Peace, Comfort of Men are fatally attacked: what Blows are ſometimes given to the Happineſs of Multitudes at once: how far more private Injuries, frequently extend their Conſequences; involving undeſigning and unknown Perſons in Calamities; affecting ſucceſſive Generations; teaching and encouraging Wickedneſs by ill Example; provoking Retaliation and Revenge; perpetuating Contention, Bitterneſs, and Rancour. In ſhort, the State of Man upon Earth would be quite another Thing than it is; and the Whole of human Affairs put on a Face intirely new; if we would be content to permit it; if, without contributing to our mutual Happineſs, we would only not obſtruct it. Sudden Deliverance from any acute Pain hath been thought, by thoſe who have experienced it, the moſt exquiſite Pleaſure they ever felt. How inexpreſſibly delightful then would the firſt Breathing of Eaſe be to Mankind, if, after the reciprocal Torments of ſo many Ages, they were all to leave off together, and become harmleſs at once! But without hoping yet for the promiſed Time of univerſal Innocence, when Men *ſhall not hurt*

nor destroy in all God's holy Mountain[o], and in Consequence of it *shall obtain Joy and Gladness, and Sorrow and Sighing shall flee away*[p]: at present, in each particular Instance, whoever only takes off his Hand from those on whom it lies heavy, cannot fail to give them great Joy: and if he doth it in a proper Manner, may secure to himself as much Gratitude from them, as by the highest unmerited Obligation. Ill Usage of others naturally makes them our Enemies: the Marks of their Enmity provoke to worse Usage of them: and so the Evil increases without End, unless the injurious Party hath the Wisdom to stop first: and then it is generally in his Power, by an honourable Acknowledgement of his Fault, or, perhaps, a mere intimation that he is convinced of it, not only to be forgiven, but respected and beloved ever after. And who doth not know, how pleasing the Consciousness of being esteemed is, how mortifying that of being hated?

There would indeed be little Occasion comparatively for the Exercise of Kindness amongst Men, if Practices of a contrary Tendency were not so frequent. A very great Part of our good Actions is really Nothing more, than

[o] Isai. xi. 9. [p] Isai. xxxv. 10.

endea-

endeavouring to undo the Harm, that we or others have done. And abſtaining from doing any would take away the Neceſſity of them; would ſtrike at the Root of Miſery, prevent the ſhocking Sight of it, the Burden and Expence of relieving it. Remedies for Evils are painful, uncertain, imperfect Things: always to be applied indeed, when they are wanted: but the true Precaution is, not to give Being to Unhappineſs. Were we all to take the utmoſt Care, there would, notwithſtanding, be too much of it. But the Obligation and Means of leſſening it would be more evident: Mens Diſpoſitions, when purged from Ill-will, inſolent Negligence, and perverſe Caprice, would be more tender and compaſſionate; and *from the good Treaſure of the Heart, good Things would be brought forth* abundantly[q]. With ſuch a Temper, every one would enjoy moſt comfortable Reflexions within himſelf: and, though his Condition were ever ſo low and diſadvantageous, would be often uſeful in one Way or another, and conſtantly agreeable, to all around him. We are formed to give and receive mutual Pleaſure: and our common daily Converſation would be delightful to us, if Wrongs,

q Matth. xii. 35.

and Unkindneſſes, and Slights, did not eſtrange us from, and ſet us againſt, each other. Bad as we are, deſigning, ſuſpicious, gloomy, haughty, neglectful, provoking; Society is neceſſary for us; we have hardly any Notion of Cheerfulneſs without it: but what ſhould we think and find it, were we aſſured of the Friendlineſs and Regard of all we met? The very being together, the Countenance of Man, would be reviving: and continual Opportunities of innocent Entertainment would ſpring up, beſides the occaſional ones of reciprocal Service and Aſſiſtance in Matters of Conſequence. But of theſe alſo there would be more and greater, when we were once inclined to look for them, than we can well conceive now. And though a Perſon could do Good only in ſmall Inſtances, it would be pure and unmixed; and that alone would be ſufficient to make it conſiderable. But were it ever ſo little: though Man judges by outward Acts, the valuable Thing in the Sight of God is virtuous Intention: and the fundamental Part of that, is Care to avoid Evil. In Proportion as we root out hurtful Inclinations, right ones will not fail to ſhoot up, and bring forth Fruit: if

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in leſs Quantity, yet ſuch as will be acccepted; but probably in Plenty.

Love, ſaith the Apoſtle, *worketh no Ill to his Neighbour: therefore Love is the fulfilling of the Law*[r]. Accordingly we find Righteouſneſs, which, taken ſtrictly, is nothing but abſtaining from Injuſtice, often mentioned in Scripture, as the Whole of our Duty: becauſe, if we begin with that, the reſt will eaſily follow. And *David*, in deſcribing the Qualifications of the Man, that *ſhall abide in the Tabernacle of the Lord, and dwell on his holy Hill*, principally inſiſts on the negative ones. *He that leadeth an uncorrupt Life, and doth the Thing which is right, and ſpeaketh the Truth from his Heart. He that hath uſed no Deceit in his Tongue, nor done Evil to his Neighbour*[s]. Again, the abovementioned Apoſtle joins the Character of mere Innocence with the moſt honourable Title, which can be given to Men: *that ye may be blameleſs and harmleſs, the Sons of God without Rebuke*[t]: a Character, which it is the peculiar Prerogative of him, who is in the higheſt Senſe the Son of God, to deſerve in Perfection. But, as St. *Peter* obſerves, he *hath left us an Example, that we*

[r] Rom. xiii. 10. [s] Pſal. xv. 2, 3. [t] Phil. ii. 15.

ſhould

ſhould follow his Steps; who did no Sin, neither was Guile found in his Mouth[a].

Thus I have endeavoured to ſhew you the Importance of the plain humble Duty of an inoffenſive Life: a Duty, which, if experience did not prove the contrary, one ſhould imagine there could be no Need of uſing many Words to recommend: as it appears impoſſible to reflect on wilful Tranſgreſſions of it, and the Miſchiefs they cauſe, without Horror. It is true, Sufferings of all Kinds are now ſo common in the World, that, unleſs it be when we ourſelves, or they who are dear to us, undergo them, they are apt to make but little Impreſſion upon us: and we can pronounce that melancholy Variety of dreadful Words, which the Miſeries of Mankind have introduced into Language, almoſt without Concern. But would we only recollect a while; conſult our own Memories, for they can generally inform us too well; or learn from ſuch Accounts, if there be Occaſion, as it is eaſy to procure; what thoſe Feelings are; which the Terms, Grief, Anxiety, Pain, Anguiſh, Dejection, Deſpair, and more of the ſame ſort, were framed to expreſs: ſurely we ſhould have a ſtrong Conviction, that for a human Creature

[a] 1 Peter ii. 21, 22.

to inflict any of these on one of his Brethren, without Necessity and without Authority, merely for some trifling Provocation, or poor worldly Advantage, to gratify some base Appetite, or perhaps only to indulge a silly Whim, is most frightful Wickedness. For, terrible Evils as they are in themselves, being exposed to them unjustly aggravates them so, as to make often the severest Part of their Torment. Then to think too of such Things, as done to each other by short-lived helpless Wretches, that are subject, to unavoidable Burdens, heavier than they know how to bear: to think of these, deliberately doubling and trebling their mutual Sorrows: in direct Contradiction, to the Exigency of their own Circumstances, which loudly require of them Forbearance, Compassion, Beneficence; to the Dictates of their own Consciences, which reproach them for every harsh Action or Expression they are guilty of; and to his known Will and positive Commands, from whom they have received all that they enjoy, and on whom it depends, whether they shall be everlastingly happy or miserable: it is so amazing, that no Tongue can set forth, no Heart conceive sufficiently, the Sinfulness or
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the Folly of ſuch Conduct. His great Deſign is the Good of his Creation. He requires us not to obſtruct it, but contribute to it. This is the principal Mark of Gratitude, which our bounteous Benefactor deſires of us: the principal Duty, which our Lawgiver and Judge enjoins us. We, at all Adventures, reſolve to diſregard him whenever we pleaſe; and boldly purſue our worldly Intereſts, our ſenſual Appetites, our ill-natured Paſſions, our wayward Humours, our wildeſt Fancies, right or wrong, let who will be the worſe for it. What Notion can a Man have of himſelf, who acts thus: what Notion of his Maker, to hope it can ever end well? We are accuſtomed to it indeed; and therefore may be tempted to look on it as a ſlight Matter. But our Maker will determine at laſt, not according to the Prejudices of Men, but the Truth of Things. We are diſpoſed to entertain very favourable Opinions of our own Behaviour: and even when we ſee it to be wrong, if we are of low Degree, we hope to be paſſed over as inconſiderable; if of high, to be treated hereafter with ſome peculiar Tenderneſs and Deference. But *God is no Reſpecter of Perſons*[w]: the meaneſt is not

[w] Acts x. 34.

beneath

beneath his Notice; the greateſt is not above his Power; the Difference between them is as Nothing in his Eyes; and both ſhall be puniſhed or rewarded according to their Deeds. May he therefore grant us all to take immediately the only Method of ſhunning his Wrath, and ſecuring his Favour, by conſidering our Ways impartially, for elſe we may believe Things to be allowable, nay commendable, which are highly criminal: by holding faſt our Integrity, ſo far as we have hitherto preſerved it: by *ceaſing to do Evil and learning to do well*, in whatever Reſpects we are faulty or deficient: by Faith in his Mercy for Pardon, and his Grace for Strength, through the Merits and Mediation of our bleſſed Redeemer: to whom, &c.

SERMON XIII.

2 SAM. xii. 13.

And David ſaid unto Nathan, I have ſinned againſt the Lord. And Nathan ſaid unto David, The Lord alſo hath put away thy Sin: thou ſhalt not die.

IN holy Scripture, not only the great and good Actions of pious Perſons are *written for our Learning*[a], that we may admire, and, as far as we are concerned, imitate them; but their chief Tranſgreſſions alſo are recorded, for a Caution to be on our Guard, and a Direction, if, like them, we have done amiſs, like them, to repent and reform. Amongſt all the Inſtances of this Kind, there is none more fruitful of Inſtruction, than that well-known Hiſtory of *David*'s being ſeduced from a religious Courſe of Life to moſt dreadful Wickedneſs, and continuing regardleſs of his Guilt, till the Prophet *Nathan* at Length having awakened him to a Senſe of it, by a

[a] Rom. xv. 4.

home Application of the parallel Caſe of the poor Man and the Ewe Lamb, brought him to the Confeſſion, and adminiſtered to him the Comfort expreſſed in the Text.

There are many Circumſtances in this Narration, which may and ought to remind us of Truths, in which we are too nearly intereſted. But the principal of them will be comprehended, if we learn from it the following Points of Doctrine.

I. That, without continual Care, the beſt of Men may be led into the worſt of Crimes.

II. That we are all very apt to overlook our own Faults, and yet to be extremely quickſighted and ſevere in Relation to thoſe of others.

III. That as ſoon as ever we are, by any Means, made ſenſible of our Offences, we ſhould acknowledge them with due Penitence.

IV. That, on doing this, the greateſt Sins will be forgiven us. Yet,

V. That Sins, even after they are forgiven, produce frequently ſuch lamentable Conſequences, that, on this Account, amongſt others, Innocence is greatly preferable to the trueſt Repentance.

I. That without continual Care the beſt of Men may be led into the worſt of Crimes.

David,

David, we are told in holy Writ, was *a Man after God's own Heart*[b]: who *did that which was right in the Eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any Thing that he commanded him, all the Days of his Life, save only in the Matter of Uriah the Hittite*[c]. Such high Expressions are never to be interpreted of any mere Man in the utmost Rigour: but the lowest Meaning must be, that he was, on the Whole, to a very high Degree, innocent of known deliberate Sin; and exemplary for Piety and Virtue, to the Age he lived in: when even they, who in some Things were favoured with Revelations from above, were in others, being left to their own Reason, less enlightened than common Christians are now, and therefore intitled to a more favourable Judgment. But independently on this Consideration, *David*'s Eminence in Goodness appears from many excellent Actions, related throughout the Books of *Samuel*: and the Psalms, written by him, are everlasting Instances of his fervent Devotion, his reverent Esteem of God's Law, his Watchfulness over his own Spirit. Nay, indeed, there is one Instance in which he appears to have been scrupulous even to an Extremity of Delicacy: when *his Heart smote him, that he had cut*

b 1 Sam. xiii. 14. Acts xiii. 22. c 1 Kings xv. 5.

off the Skirt of Saul's Garment[d]. Suppose, now, the Prophet *Nathan* had foretold concerning such a Man as this, that in a little Time he would commit the capital Sin of Adultery; and, when the Scheme which he had framed to hide it was frustrated, would calmly contrive to murder by Treachery the Man whom he had injured, intrust others with his Purpose, execute it by their Means, and triumphantly take his Wife home to himself: who could possibly have believed the Prediction; or how could *David* have received the most respectful Warning against such Enormities, but with contempt or Indignation? Yet so it was: even this good Man, even when grown old in Religion, was guilty of Deeds, which many habitual Sinners, though prompted by youthful Passion, and unrestrained by the Fear of God, would still have abhorred.

And if this was the Case of *David*, then *let him that thinketh he standeth, take Heed lest he fall*[e]. Few, it may be doubted, have the same Warmth of right Resolution; but all have the same deceitful Nature: and therefore we must all be continually attentive; or we know not into what Abominations we may be drawn.

[d] 1 Sam. xxiv. 5. [e] 1 Cor. x. 12.

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Every Man hath within him the Principles of every bad Action, that the worst Man ever did. And though in some they are languid, and seem scarce alive; yet, if fostered by Indulgence, they will soon grow to incredible Strength: nay, if only left to themselves, will in Seasons favourable to them, shoot up, and over-run the Heart, with such surprising Quickness, that all the good Seed shall be choaked on a sudden by Tares, which we never imagined had been within us. And what increases the Danger is, that each of us hath some wrong Inclination or other, it is well if not several, beyond the rest natural to us, and the Growth of the Soil. These, therefore, we must be especially diligent to keep under, and weed out the least Fibres of them that we can perceive: else we shall find them *Roots of Bitterness*, continually *springing up to trouble and defile us*[f]. Then, besides all our inward Weaknesses, the World about us is thick set round with Snares, differently formed: some provoking us to immoderate Passion, or envious Malignity; some alluring us with forbidden Pleasures, or softening us into Supineness and Indolence, or *overcharging our Hearts with the Cares of this Life*[g],

[f] Heb. xii. 15. [g] Luke xxi. 34.

or bribing us with Hopes of unlawful Gain to do ill, or terrifying us with a Prospect of Sufferings for doing well. Delusive Suggestions, indeed, every one of them: but of specious Appearance, unless we examine them thoroughly, unless we look beyond them. And as more or fewer of these Temptations are almost constantly, and often suddenly, attacking us, to which the Wicked one will not fail to superadd his own secret Insinuations, as far as ever he is permitted; the Hazard of our Situation is very evident, and our Watchfulness ought surely to be in Proportion to it.

Not that, with all this, we have the least Cause to be disheartened, but only on our Guard. He that imagines himself to be safe, never is so: but they, who keep in their Minds a Sense of their Danger, and pray for, and trust in, Help from God, will always be able to avoid or go through it. Temptation hath no Power, the great Tempter himself hath no Power, but that of using Persuasion. Forced we cannot be, so long as we are true to ourselves. Our own Consent must be our own giving: and without it, the rest is Nothing. For then only, in Effect, St. *James* tells us[h], *is every Man tempted, when he is drawn away*

[h] James i. 14.

of

of his own Lust and inticed. That we are liable to Sin, therefore, ought to be no Discouragement, and can be no Justification, to us: for, by the Assistance of Heaven, though not else, we may escape it if we will: and that Assistance is expresly promised to our Endeavours and our Prayers. *Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you: draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you*[1]. But to the strictest Vigilance it must be a powerful Incitement, to consider, how often we, how often Persons much better than we, have merely through Want of Vigilance, been guilty of such Transgressions as could never have been suspected. But, indeed, when once we allow ourselves to go wrong, we can neither know nor guess how far we shall go.

David at first violated only the Rules of Decency, which he might easily have observed, and have turned away his Eyes from an improper Object. This, which doubtless he was willing to think a very pardonable Gratification of Nothing worse than Curiosity, carried him on far beyond his first Intention, to the heinous Crime of Adultery. There, undoubtedly, he designed to stop, and keep what had passed secret from all the

[1] James iv. 7, 8.

World. But Virtue hath Ground to ſtand upon; Vice hath not: and, if we give Way at all, the Tendency downward increaſes every Moment. Sometimes the treacherous Pleaſantneſs of the Path invites us to ſtray a little farther, though we are ſenſible it deſcends to the Gates of Hell. Sometimes the Conſciouſneſs, that we are guilty already, tempts us to fancy it immaterial how much more we become ſo: without reflecting, that by every Sin which we add, we diminiſh the Hope of Retreat, and augment the Weight of our Condemnation. Sometimes again, as in the Caſe before us, one Act of Wickedneſs requires another, or many more, to cover it: and they, whom no Fear of God, or Shame of doing Evil, could awe ſufficiently, have yet ſuch a prepoſterous Fear of Men, and Shame of being found out, that, to avoid a Diſcovery, they will commit ſtill worſe Evil, and then be diſcovered at laſt. Thus did *David*. After he had tried in vain to conceal his Adultery from *Uriah* by an Artifice, which the gallant Soldier, without knowing it, diſappointed from a Principle of Honour; he was driven to the moſt horrible of all Wickedneſs, Murder; and a Murder too, accompanied with the heavieſt Aggravations: deliberately planned, brought

brought about by Treachery, in which alſo he involved the General at leaſt, if not many others of the Army, as his Inſtruments: and made the poor Man himſelf, as if he had not been injured and deceived enough before, the Bearer of thoſe Letters, which doomed him to die, innocent of all Miſbehaviour, of all Imputation of Miſbehaviour, and valiantly fighting for his Sovereign, by whom he was betrayed and aſſaſſinated.

In this dreadful Manner was one, who had been till then of an excellent Character, hurried on, from a ſingle, and ſeemingly ſlight, Indulgence, into the Depth of the groſſeſt and moſt ſhocking Villanies. And in the like Manner may any one, if he is not upon his Guard againſt *the Deceitfulneſs of Sin*[k], be hurried unawares to his final Deſtruction. That Sin, indeed, with which *David* began, is peculiarly inſnaring and pernicious. The lower Degrees of Immodeſty lead on imperceptibly to the moſt unlawful Familiarities. Theſe intangle Perſons in a Variety of Difficulties, that reduce them to do the baſeſt and cruelleſt Things that can be. And particularly as Unchaſtity induced *David* to Treachery and Murder, ſo there hath

k Heb. iii. 13.

been

been in all Times more Treachery, and more Murder, of Rivals, of poor innocent Children, of one another, of themſelves, occaſioned by it, than perhaps by any other Tranſgreſſion whatever.

But all others have, in their ſeveral Proportions, the Tendency of ſinking us into deeper Guilt. Leſſer Inſtances of Diſhoneſty lead, often by ſlow, but uſually ſure, Steps, to the more enormous and capital Crimes of that Sort. Leſſer Inſtances of undue Parſimony grow inſenſibly into the meaneſt and moſt ſordid Avarice: leſſer Inſtances of Greedineſs of Gain, into the moſt hard-hearted Rapaciouſneſs. And on the other Hand, little Negligences in their Affairs, little Affectations of living above their Ability, little Pieces of expenſive Vanity and Extravagance, are the direct Road to thoſe confirmed Habits of Careleſſneſs and Prodigality, by which People fooliſhly and wickedly ruin themſelves and their Families, and too commonly others beſides their own. After the ſame Manner, ſlight Expreſſions, in Words or Behaviour, of Contempt or Ill-humour, eaſily ſwell into the fierceſt Contention, the bittereſt Reſentment, the moſt rancorous Hatred. And, to ſpecify no more Particulars, mere indolent Omiſſions

Omiſſions of religious Duties, public or private, leave our Sentiments of Piety to languiſh and decay, till we become utterly unmindful of our eternal Intereſt: and, it may be, at laſt, profane Scoffers and Blaſphemers againſt God. Always, therefore, beware of ſmall Sins. Great ones carry ſomething in them, that ſtartles and alarms: but theſe, inſinuating themſelves more gently, gain Admittance more readily; and ſo, as the Son of *Sirach* wiſely obſerves, *He that contemneth little Things, ſhall fall by little and little*[1].

II. The next Point to be obſerved from this Part of Scripture-hiſtory is, that Men are very apt to overlook their own Miſdemeanors, and yet to be extremely quick-ſighted and ſevere in Relation to thoſe of others.

The Facts which *David* had committed were the plaineſt, the moſt palpable, the moſt crying Sins that could be: Nothing, one ſhould think, to excuſe them; Nothing to diſguiſe them; no Name but their own to call them by: Adultery, Falſehood, Murder. From the firſt to the laſt there muſt have intervened ſome conſiderable Space of Time, with a great deal of Thought upon the Subject: yet no Re-

[1] Ecclus xix. 1.

flexion

flexion that deterred him from proſecuting his wicked Schemes. Even after the Murder, many Months appear to have paſſed before *Nathan* was ſent to him: ſtill *David* had not recollected himſelf, but ſeemed to go on in perfect Tranquillity. Nay, which is more aſtoniſhing than the reſt, when the Prophet had contrived a Story on Purpoſe to convict him of his Guilt, repreſenting the firſt Part of it ſo exactly, that Nothing, which was not the ſame under different Names, could be liker, it never once brought it, ſo far as appears, to his Memory. Yet all this while he had not, in the leaſt Degree, loſt the Senſe of what was right and wrong in general. So far from it, that he was moved with the moſt vehement Abhorrence of the rich Man's barbarous Injuſtice and Oppreſſion, in taking away his poor Neighbour's Lamb from him, when he had Plenty of his own. *And* David's *Anger was greatly kindled againſt the Man: and he ſaid to* Nathan, *As the Lord liveth, the Man, that hath done this Thing, ſhall ſurely die: and he ſhall reſtore the Lamb fourfold, becauſe he did this Thing, and becauſe he had no Pity. And* Nathan *ſaid to* David, *Thou art the Man.*

How

How ſurprizing a Blow muſt this be! In the Midſt of his Wrath, when, forgetful of his own Iniquity, he had not only adjudged a Perſon, much leſs culpable, to pay the legal Penalty of a quadruple Reſtitution, but, from exceſſive Deteſtation of his Crime, indeed a hateful once, had even, contrary to Law, pronounced Sentence of Death upon him; then to be told, *Thou art the Man!* Let us often think of this Caſe: and as often remember, that, with equal Truth, though God forbid it ſhould be in an equal Meaſure, the ſame Thing holds concerning every one of us. We all know our Duty, or eaſily may: we are all abundantly ready at ſeeing and cenſuring what others do amiſs: and yet we all continue, more or leſs, to do amiſs ourſelves, without regarding it. The main Precepts of Life, ſuch as we are moſt apt to fail in, are partly obvious to Reaſon, partly taught with ſufficient Clearneſs by Revelation. And though, for Want of cultivating their own Underſtandings, or hearkening to God's Word, ſome wicked Actions, plauſibly diſguiſed, may be eſteemed, by too many, allowable, or even laudable; yet the Maſk is not hard to pull off; and the more heinous Sort, indeed the higher Degrees of all, have a Deformity almoſt

almoſt incapable of being hidden. Let all the Sophiſtry in the World recommend, let all the Powers upon Earth enjoin, Irreligion, Cruelty, Fraud, promiſcuous Lewdneſs: it will, notwithſtanding, be altogether impoſſible, either to make the Practice of them tolerable to Society, or to change in all the inward Abhorrence of them, which Mankind in general are led by Nature to entertain. It is true, where Iniquity of any Kind is once publicly practiſed and allowed, human Minds are apt to be ſtrangely blinded in Relation to it, eſpecially if they have no Revelation from above to direct them. And even though the Bulk of a Nation be more enlightened and more virtuous, yet, in ſome Perſons, on ſome Occaſions, natural Sentiments may be weakened or depraved, by early wrong Notions and immoral Habits; as in others common Underſtanding is impaired, or loſt, by bodily Diſorders. It may alſo in Caſes of Intricacy be doubted, whether ſuch an Action deſerves ſuch a Name; while yet, if it doth, it is allowed to be bad. But ſtill the Majority even of Heathens, and ſurely then of Chriſtians, do or may, for the moſt Part, as clearly diſcern what is blameable and commendable, as what is crooked and ſtreight. Let this be tried in a Tranſaction

of

of any diſtant Age or Country, or in a feigned Piece of Hiſtory, ſuch as the Prophet invented for *David*; and, unleſs they ſuſpect it to be deſigned as a Parallel for themſelves, they will very ſeldom fail, if they conſider at all, of paſſing a righteous Sentence. Let it be tried in the Conduct of an Acquaintance or Contemporary; the principal Danger will be, of a Sentence too rigorous. For if the Sin, brought in Queſtion before us, be one to which we have no Inclination, we ſhall be ſure to cenſure it without the leaſt Mercy. And though it be one of which we have been guilty, provided our Guilt be unknown or forgotten, we can uſually declare againſt it as harſhly, as the moſt innocent Perſon alive. Or how moderate ſoever the Conſciouſneſs of our own paſt Behaviour might otherwiſe diſpoſe us to be: yet if once we come to be Sufferers ourſelves by the ſame Kind of Sins, which we have formerly indulged, and perhaps often made others ſuffer by them, then we can be immoderately loud in our Complaints of what formerly we fancied, or pretended, had little or no Hurt in it. Nay, without any ſuch Provocation, few Things are commoner, than to hear People condemn their own Faults in thoſe around them: and, ſome-

times poſſibly to blind the World, but very frequently becauſe they are blind to themſelves, vehemently exclaiming againſt Vices, to which, if all that know them are not ſtrangely miſtaken, they are moſt notoriouſly addicted. Not uncommonly, indeed, this is the true Reaſon of ſuch Invectives. One Man's Pride or Selfiſhneſs ſtands in the Way of another, juſt as proud, or as ſelfiſh: and he hath no Patience to ſee any one elſe do what he wants to do without Controll.

Now theſe Inſtances prove we are convinced, that all Sorts of Sins are wrong: only we err in the Application of our Conviction. No one's Failings eſcape us, but our own: and of them the moſt glaring eſcape us. Self-love perſuades us to think favourably of our Conduct in general: a ſecret Suſpicion which we labour to ſtifle, reſtrains us from examining much into Particulars: what we are ſtrongly diſpoſed to do, we think we muſt, for the ſake of inward Peace, endeavour to believe harmleſs or excuſable: this puts us on ſeeking out for real or imaginary Differences of Circumſtances, which, we flatter ourſelves, make that either innocent, or nearly ſo, in us, which in others ought not to be borne. Then, in ſome Things, the Bounds between

between lawful and unlawful are hard to be exactly determined. Now unfair Minds lay hold on these Difficulties with inexpressible Eagerness: and chusing, not, as they should, the safer Side, but that, to which the Bias within attracts them, proceed, under the Cover of such Doubts, to the most undoubted Wickedness: as if, because it is not easy to say precisely, at what Moment of the Evening Light ends and Darkness begins, therefore Midnight could not be distinguished from Noon-day. Thus, because it cannot be ascertained, just how much every one ought to give in Charity, too many will give Nothing, or next to Nothing. Because the Price of Labour, and of the Commodities produced by it, have no absolute Standard; they will to the utmost oppress the Poor in their Wages, or the Valuation of what they bring to sell; and nevertheless make the most unconscionable Demands on those, who come to buy of them. Because no one can settle to a Nicety, what Sobriety and Temperance permit, and no more: therefore Men will *feed themselves without Fear* [m], and *tarry long at the Wine* [n], make *their Belly their God, and glory in their*

[m] Jude 12. [n] Prov. xxiii. 30.

Shame[o]. Becauſe it cannot be exactly decided, how much Time is the moſt that we may allowably ſpend in Recreation and Amuſement: therefore Multitudes will conſume almoſt the Whole of their Days in Trifling and Levity and Folly, inſtead of applying to the proper Buſineſs of Life, in order to *give their Account with Joy to him, who ſhall judge the Quick and the Dead*[p].

Theſe and the like Things they will, ſome of them, defend and palliate with wonderful Acuteneſs; deſigned partly to excuſe them to others, but chiefly to deceive and pacify themſelves. Not that they ever attain either of theſe Ends. For their Neighbours, after all, juſt as plainly perceive their Faults, as they perceive thoſe of their Neighbours. And it is but a half Deceit, that they put upon their own Souls. Every now and then they ſee through it, whether they will or will not; ſee a very threatening Proſpect before them: and, though they do ſhut their Eyes, and ſlumber again, and tell themſelves all is Peace; yet this Dream of Security is but a very diſturbed one: Nothing like the clear and joyful Perception, that he hath, whoſe Conſcience is

[o] Phil. iii. 19. [p] Heb. xiii. 17. 1 Pet. iv. 5.

 thoroughly

thoroughly awake, and aſſures him of his own Innocence, or true Repentance, and Intereſt in the Pardon, which his Redeemer hath purchaſed. But in however *ſtrong Deluſion*[q] God may permit them to remain at preſent: how can they be ſure, but ere long Remorſe may ſeize them, an Adverſary expoſe them, a Friend rebuke them: one Way or other, the Caſe of *David*, who doubtleſs thought he was exceedingly ſafe, become theirs; and ſome Voice proclaim aloud to them, what they are afraid of whiſpering to themſelves, *Thou art the Man!* Though indeed, could we effectually impoſe on all the World, and our own Minds too; could this Impoſition laſt to our Life's End, and not vaniſh at the Approach of Death, which commonly repreſents to the guilty their paſt Conduct in a very new and tremendous Light; what could we get by it, but more certain and exquiſite Miſery?

Therefore one of the happieſt Things imaginable is, being made ſenſible of our Sins in Time: and the firſt Step to that is, reflecting how liable we are, both to commit them and to overlook them. If ſuch a one as *David* could fall into ſuch Tranſgreſſions as he did, and con-

[q] 2 Theſſ. ii. 11.

tinue in them ſo long, and forget them ſo intirely: into how many groſs ones, into how many more ſpeciouſly coloured over, may we have fallen in the Courſe of our Lives, negligent as we are! And how poſſible is it, unleſs we have faithfully ſearched our Hearts, that we may be thoughtleſsly going on to a future State, and ſome of us near it, under heavy Loads of complicated Guilt! Surely Self-inſpection then is abſolutely neceſſary: and if we ſet about the Work honeſtly, it is by no Means difficult. What paſſes within our Breaſts is not far from us: what hath paſſed there formerly may, in general, be recollected: and what we are uſually forced to take much Pains to hide from ourſelves, we may, if we will, ſoon lay open. Let us each, therefore, conſider ſeriouſly, as Perſons whoſe Intereſt lies in diſcovering, not concealing: Is there no *Way of Wickedneſs in me*[r], no Blot upon my Conduct and Character? No Failing, that I ſhould reproach my Neighbour for; none that my Enemy or Ill-wiſher, at leaſt if he knew all, as I do, and God doth, could reproach me for? Are there not, indeed, ſeveral Things of this Kind, and how many, and what are they? For it is my Concern to

[r] Pſal. cxxxix. 24.

know

know them all; and to think, what the End of all will be. Such an Inquiry as this would call off our Attention from the too pleasing Employment of judging those around us, to a more important Trial within. We should see, that if they have Faults, so have we likewise great ones, though it may be of different Kinds: and which are worse upon the Whole, is for God alone to determine. Our common Guilt acquits neither before him; excuses neither for the mutual Injuries they do, authorizes neither to disregard the Censure of the World: but this Effect the Sense, how blameworthy we all are, should certainly have: it should restrain even the best of us from reproving with Haughtiness, and punishing with Severity: it should incline the more obnoxious to be singularly gentle and mild in Relation to Offenders: and it should instruct us every one to think and act with great Charity towards others, and employ our Zeal chiefly, where there will seldom be Danger of Excess, in correcting and reforming ourselves. But this would bring me to the third Head: to which I must not proceed at present: and shall therefore conclude with begging you to observe, concerning what you have heard already, that

you will never become either duly ſenſible of your ſinful Diſpoſitions and actual Tranſgreſſions, or able to amend what you do find of them, unleſs you are firſt excited, and then aſſiſted, by the Grace of our bleſſed Saviour, *without whom we can do Nothing*[s]. Therefore, whenever Duties of any Kind are preſſed upon you, always remember, whether you are told it or not, that you muſt pray as well as endeavour: pray in his Name, and *through Faith in his Blood*[t], *who of God is made unto us Wiſdom, and Righteouſneſs, and Sanctification, and Redemption*[u]: fully aſſured, that, weak as we are in ourſelves, *we can do all Things through Chriſt, which ſtrengtheneth us*[x]: to whom, therefore, &c.

[s] John xv. 5. [t] Rom. iii. 25. [u] 1 Cor. i. 30.
[x] Phil. iv. 13.

SERMON XIV.

2 SAM. xii. 13.

And David ſaid unto Nathan, I have ſinned againſt the Lord: and Nathan ſaid unto David, The Lord alſo hath put away thy Sin, thou ſhalt not die.

FROM that Portion of Scripture, in which theſe Words are contained, I lately recommended to your ſerious Notice the following Points of Doctrine.

I. That without continual Care, the beſt of Men may be led into the worſt of Crimes.

II. That we are all very apt to overlook our own Faults, and yet to be extremely quick-ſighted and ſevere in Relation to thoſe of others.

III. That as ſoon as ever we are, by any Means, made ſenſible of our Offences, we ſhould acknowledge them with due Penitence.

IV. That, on doing this, the greateſt Sins will be forgiven us. Yet,

V. That Sins, even after they are forgiven, produce frequently ſuch lamentable Conſequences, that on this Account, amongſt others, Innocence is greatly preferable to the trueſt Repentance.

On the two firſt of theſe I have already diſcourſed: and proceed now to the

III. That as ſoon as we are, by any Means, made ſenſible of our Offences, we ought to acknowledge them with due Penitence.

David, it ſeems, till the Prophet came to put him on conſidering his Ways, had not done it to any good Purpoſe, ever ſince the Adultery and Murder which he had committed: though a very little Thought had been ſufficient, and it is amazing, that he could avoid thinking enough, to ſhew him his Guilt. Had he continued inſenſible of it, not all his paſt Piety could have preſerved him from future Damnation. For the Threatening which God commanded the Prophet *Ezekiel* to pronounce, ever hath been, and will be, without Exception, the Rule of his Proceeding. *Son of Man, ſay unto the Children of thy People, When I ſay to the righteous, that he ſhall ſurely live: if he truſt to his own Righteouſneſs, and commit Iniquity, all his Righteouſneſs*

teousness shall not be remembered[a]. *In his Trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his Sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die*[b]. But, though it was not consistent with infinite Justice, Holiness and Wisdom, to accept *David*, whilst in this Condition: yet it was perfectly suitable to infinite Goodness to awaken him out of it. Accordingly, *Nathan* was sent to him with a divine Commission for that Purpose: who having first endeavoured, without Success, to execute it in a gentler and more respectful Way, that of insinuating Admonition, applied his Parable at last in the plainest Words; nor was content with telling him directly, *Thou art the Man*, but undoubtedly finding it requisite, followed even this Home-charge yet farther, by laying the Particulars of his Guilt, with its heavy Aggravations, before his Eyes. And here *David*'s Example begins to be as useful for our Imitation, as it had been before for our Warning. Struck to the very Heart with the Sense of so many and heinous Iniquities, crowding in at once upon his Mind; and abhorring himself for being able, first to commit, and then to overlook them; he cries out, *I have sinned against the Lord*. Few Words,

[a] Ezek. xxxiii. 12, 13. [b] Ezek. xviii. 24.

indeed,

indeed; but greatly expressive; and the more, for being few. Astonishment, Confusion, Terror, might well stop the Utterance of more for the present, and for no small Time. Afterwards his Sorrow obtained the Relief of free Vent: and his penitent Psalms, especially the fifty-first, composed, as the Title informs us, on this very Occasion, express, most pathetically, the Depth of his Humiliation, and the Earnestness of his Intreaties for Pardon, even after he had been assured of it: for still the Consciousness, that he was unworthy to receive it, would prompt him to beg it continually. *Have Mercy upon me, O God, according to thy Loving-kindness: according to the Multitude of thy tender Mercies blot out my Transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine Iniquity: and cleanse me from my Sin. For I acknowledge my Transgressions: and my Sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this Evil in thy Sight*[c]. As if he had said, great as my Crime is against my Fellow-creatures, it is Nothing, compared with that against my Creator. However secure I may be against their Resentment, it yields me no Comfort, while I continue an Object of his Wrath. You may read over

[c] Psal. li. 1, 2, 3, 4.

the

the reſt in private: the ſame Spirit breathes from the Beginning to the End. Now, the King might eaſily have given the Prophet a very different Reception: have denied the Fact, driven him from his Preſence, confined him as a Madman, puniſhed him as a falſe Accuſer: or might have broke off the Diſcourſe as ſoon as it grew painful, pleaded urgent Affairs, and told him as *Felix* did *Paul*, even when he trembled under his Preaching, *Go thy Way for this Time: when I have a convenient Seaſon, I will call for thee*[d]: a Seaſon which he determined ſhould never come. Nay, truly, according to modern Modes of Thinking, he might have frankly owned the Whole: treated the Adultery as a Trifle, eſpecially in a Perſon of any Rank; and perhaps the Murder too, as an undeſirable Conſequence indeed, but an unavoidable one, of *Uriah*'s abſurd Behaviour. For Sinners have numberleſs Arts to fence againſt the Reproaches of others, and to pacify themſelves. But *David* had now too affecting a Conviction of the Horrors of the State in which he had lived ſo long, once to think of adding to it freſh Offences: and therefore, without the leaſt Anger at the Prophet, without the leaſt Excuſe for his own Conduct,

[d] Acts xxiv. 25.

without

without the leaſt Delay, he humbly confeſſes, *I have ſinned againſt the Lord*.

Let all of us then, who like *David* have ſinned, in whatever Inſtance it be, greater or leſs, repent like *David* too; and, inſtead of perverſely defending ourſelves by the bad Part of his Example, reſolve immediately to reform ourſelves according to the good. Better were it alſo, that our Amendment ſhould be accompliſhed by our own private Reflexions on what we have done amiſs: for this would manifeſt a greater Senſibility of Heart, and Strength of good Purpoſe, than if foreign Aid appear to be wanting. But the Caſe before us plainly ſhews that we have ſometimes abſolute Need of other Monitors, beſides that within. For if a Man, of ſo much Piety and Diſcernment as *David* had, was ſo long without thinking, and perhaps, left to himſelf, would never have thought effectually, of ſuch flagrant Crimes as his were: how highly neceſſary is ſome Remembrancer to the Generality of Perſons, who are ſo deſirous to impoſe upon themſelves, and in the many Points of Conduct, where that worſt Kind of Deluſion is ſo eaſily practiſed! As therefore God appointed his Prophets formerly by occaſional and extraordinary Commiſſions, he hath now

now given the Minifters of his Word a ftanding and conftant one, to *fhew his People their Tranfgreffion, and the Houfe of Jacob their Sins*[c]. We have not, as they had often, the Cafes of fingle Perfons revealed to us, and given us in Charge: nor need we now, when the Returns of public Inftruction and Exhortation, comprehending all Cafes, are fo frequent. We are not fent to this or that Sinner by Name: and it is but feldom, that we dare truft ourfelves to undertake voluntarily a Matter of fuch Delicacy, as feparate Reproof or Examination; where falfe Reports and Opinions, Prejudices and Paffions, may fo probably occafion us to miftake, or be miftaken; and Circumftances without Number may produce Harm from our Attempt, inftead of Good. From this Place, therefore, we direct our Warnings to you all in general: and deceive not yourfelves, and injure not us, by fufpecting us at any Time of fuch Wickednefs and Folly, as to think of pointing from hence at any one in particular. We leave it intirely to your own Confciences to tell each of you in your Turn, when your own Guilt is touched, *Thou art the Man*. We hope they tell you fo faithfully, when we little imagine

[c] Ifaiah lviii. 1.

there is Need of it: and the Intent of the Ministry committed to us, is, that they ſhould. *For the Word of God*, intruſted with us, unworthy as we are, *is quick and powerful, and ſharper than any two-edged Sword, piercing even to the dividing aſunder of Soul and Spirit, and of the Joints and Marrow, and is a Diſcerner of the Thoughts and Intents of the Heart*[f]. It is to him you lie open, and not to us, when you hear your Boſom-Sins deſcribed. It is from knowing, chiefly by the Study of the holy Scriptures, what Mankind are, that we ſpeak, not from Information what ſuch or ſuch a Man is, when you fancy we hint at the Failings of your Neighbours. Uſe not therefore the Preaching of the Goſpel, either for a Matter of Reproach to them, or of Accuſation againſt us: but ſolely in Subſervience to its important Deſign, the Reformation of yourſelves. Whenever the Picture of Deformity, which we draw, is not your own; thank God for it, and forbear to conſider, whom it may reſemble. Whenever it is your own, in Whole or in Part, which the Witneſs within your Breaſts will, if permitted, and perhaps though forbidden, plainly ſignify to you; embrace the Conviction meekly and

[f] Heb. iv. 12.

ſincerely:

ſincerely: ſtand not againſt it, fly not from it; but ſearch the Wound to the Bottom, and let Repentance *have its perfect Work*[s].

Indeed, let the Perſon, that makes you known to yourſelves, be ever ſo little authorized to do it, ſtill you are indiſpenſably concerned to take Notice of it. If he profeſs himſelf a Friend, he hath given you the trueſt and boldeſt Proof of his Friendſhip, that can be. If he be a mere Acquaintance, or a Stranger, but appear to admoniſh you with good Intention; you ought to eſteem him for it as long as you live. And were you to believe him ever ſo much your Enemy, never let that provoke you to become your own: think only, if he ſpeaks Truth, and ſubmit to it; amend, and diſappoint him. Strive not to make yourſelves eaſy in what you feel is wrong, but quit it. Strive not to colour over and palliate Matters: for this is deceiving no one, but your own Souls. If you are hitherto undiſcovered by the World, leaving off is by far the likelieſt Way to be ſecure: if others know your Faults, all you have remaining is to let them know your Penitence too. On this, whoever hath any Senſe, either of Religion or Humanity,

s James i. 4.

will

will treat you tenderly. But whatever Shame may attend acknowledging Errors and changing wrong Courſes, it is only Part of what they have deſerved; and we had much better be aſhamed in this Life, than the next. Sooner or later, every Sinner muſt repent: and the ſingle Queſtion is, whether it ſhall be hereafter, when Grief will ſerve only for an Ingredient in our Miſery; or now, while it may intirely prevent the Danger, and be followed immediately by Comfort and Joy. Surely this Caſe is much too clear to admit of Doubt. And therefore let us all zealouſly purſue the Advice given to *Job*: *If Iniquity be in thine Hand, put it far away, and let not Wickedneſs dwell in thy Tabernacle. For then ſhalt thou lift up thy Face without Spot: yea, thou ſhalt be ſtedfaſt, and ſhalt not fear*[h]. No ſooner had *David* ſaid, with due Contrition of Heart, *I have ſinned againſt the Lord*, but *Nathan* revived him with that Aſſurance, *The Lord alſo hath put away thy Sin, thou ſhalt not die*: which is the Ground-work of the Obſervation to be made from the Text,

IV. That if we repent as we ought, the greateſt Sins will be forgiven us.

[h] Job xi. 14, 15.

This

This indeed our own Reason cannot promise, with any Certainty at all. God we know is good. Man is frail. And hence we have Cause to hope, that his Goodness will extend to the Pardon of our Frailties. But then, in Proportion as we go beyond Frailties, to gross, deliberate, wilful, habitual Transgressions, this Hope diminishes continually: till at Length it becomes exceedingly doubtful; and especially to those, whose inward Peace depends the most upon not doubting, whether the Holiness of God's Nature, and the Honour of his universal Government will suffer him to pardon some Offenders at all, however penitent; whether any, without previous Correction; (who knows what, or how long?) and whether he will bestow future Happiness, for a greater Time or a less, even where he may inflict no future Punishment. Still, in the Midst of these Perplexities, be they ever so inextricable, Repentance, including the Amendment for which Men have Strength, is not only their Duty, but their Wisdom too: because Insensibility of old Sins, and Addition of new ones, will make their Condition, bad as it may be, daily worse: and so far as any Thing of their own doing can better it, Reformation must. But Knowledge

of thus much only, though it affords very proper Direction, suggests little Comfort at the same Time, or Spirit to follow Direction. And therefore every Manifestation of his Pleasure, which God hath made to Man from the Beginning, hath always carried in it some Encouragement to trust in his Mercy, beyond the Motives which our unassisted Faculties were able to furnish. Yet the Pardon of such Sins, attended with such Aggravations, as *David's* were, had not, even in his Days, by any Means been expresly promised. And therefore this Declaration of the Prophet must not only relieve him, in the Agony of his Guilt, from the dreadfullest Apprehensions that can be conceived; on which Account, we may presume, it was made to him so instantly: but must also diffuse Consolation among Multitudes, through that and the following Ages, which could not fail to be acquainted with so extraordinary a Case; and must incline all true Penitents to believe, that theirs also, whatever it was, would, on like Terms, obtain Favour. But still it is easy to mistake in arguing from one Case to another, especially our own: besides that particular Instances do not amount to general Assurances. And though such Assurances were

given in the latter Part of the *Jewish* Revelation, chiefly by the Prophet *Ezekiel*[i]: yet it might not be clear to every one, whether they related to another Life, or only to the present: nor was this Revelation received, or known almost, in any Nation, excepting that one. The unlimited Gospel-promises therefore of Forgiveness and Grace, proclaimed to all the World, have made a Change, unspeakably happy, in the Condition of Mankind.

And now, as we are strangely apt to apply every Thing wrong, too many, instead of the Extreme of Despondency, run into that of profane Boldness: and are very near looking upon Sin, as Nothing to be dreaded; and Remission of Sin, as Nothing to be thankful for. At least the Certainty of it, they conceive, they could easily have discovered of themselves: and therefore have little Obligation to *Christ*, the Publisher of a Truth so obvious. Nor is it a Wonder, if they, who think slightly of Transgression, think slightly of Pardon also: taking one to be a Trifle, they must take the other to be a Matter of Course. But whoever considers in earnest, what it is to have disobeyed the Commands, and contradicted the wise and good

[i] Ezek. xviii. 21, 22, 23. xxxiii. 14, 15, 16.

Purpoſes of the Almighty; to have injured his Creatures, our own Brethren; to have perverted the Nature he hath given us; to have diſqualified ourſelves from doing and being what he made us for; and to have been guilty of all this, in Spite of the Expoſtulations of our Conſciences and our Friends, and of his expreſs Threatenings of Hell-fire: far from entertaining preſumptuous Imaginations of Safety, from any Thing he can know by his own Wiſdom, or perform by his own Strength, will earneſtly long for Inſtruction and Help from above; and feel the moſt affectionate Gratitude to him, who hath not only revealed, but procured Peace for us, at the Price of his Blood: offering up his Life on the Croſs, Son of God as he was: ſo great was the Difficulty, to make it conſiſtent with Juſtice and Holineſs to exerciſe Mercy!

Indeed, after all that hath been done to aſſure us it ſhall be exerciſed, there are ſome, of Minds more tenderly ſenſible than ordinary, who, after committing great Offences, or, perhaps, only ſuch as to them appear very great, experience the utmoſt Reluctance, either to be reconciled to themſelves, or perſuaded that God will be reconciled to them. And hence not a few

few of them plunge deſperately into whatever Folly or Sin will drive away their Uneaſineſs for the preſent; while others go on in the moſt punctual Practice of Piety, but enjoy ſcarce any Satisfaction from it, overwhelming themſelves, on every Occaſion and none, with groundleſs Terrors. The pernicious Impatience of the former proceeds, in great Meaſure, from a very abſurd and criminal Pride, which ought to be humbled by the prudent Severity of juſt Reproof. But the meek Dejection of the latter calls for the tendereſt Compaſſion and the kindeſt Encouragement; yet, perhaps, intermixed, now and then, with ſome Degree of gentle Chiding. To ſuch therefore it muſt be ſaid; your Grief and Fear prove, that your Heart is not hardened, but but ſincerely deſirous to ſerve and pleaſe God: the good Works, which he enables you to perform ſo regularly, prove your Faith and Repentance: the Imperfections, which you bewail, all his Children have, not you alone. *Why then are you caſt down, and your Soul diſquieted within you*[k]? How ill ſoever you may think of yourſelves; though God requires you not in the leaſt to think worſe than the Truth, and would have you judge calmly of your ſpiritual

[k] Pſ. xlii. 5.

State, not under the Disability of a Fright: but whatever Opinion you may form of your own Deserts, forbear to entertain an injurious one of him. When he hath sent his blessed Son to make Atonement for you, when he hath told you in his holy Word, when he tells you by his Ministers every Day, that this Atonement reaches to the very worst of Cases, do not except your own in Contradiction to him: do not indulge Doubts and Scruples about what he hath plainly promised, in order to be miserable against his Will: but, together with the Sorrow of having offended, allow yourselves to feel the Joy of being restored to Favour. A wise and good Parent would wish to have his Child affected only in a moderate Manner with a Sense of his past Faults, when once he is returned to his Duty: and though still he hath the Weaknesses incident to his tender Age, doth not reject him for them, or desire he should sink under them; but strive against them with a chearing Belief, that he shall out-grow them, as he approaches to Maturity. Why will you not reflect then, that, *like as a Father pitieth his own Children, even so is the Lord merciful to them that fear him? For he knoweth whereof we are made; he remembereth that we are but Dust*[1]. It

[1] Psal. ciii. 13, 14.

It is extremely unhappy, that when Perſons attend public Diſcourſes on Religion, in which different Inſtructions, deſigned for as different Sorts of Auditors, muſt however be ſpoken to all Sorts promiſcuouſly, each, for the moſt Part, applies to himſelf juſt what doth not belong to him, notwithſtanding the beſt Care to prevent it. The bold Sinner confides moſt ſecurely in what he hears of God's Mercy: while the low-ſpirited Penitent almoſt dies away at the Mention of his Juſtice. The firſt hath no Dread of the moſt wilful Sins, becauſe the Nature of Man is frail: the laſt hath no Peace about the moſt excuſable Deficiencies, becauſe the Precepts of the Goſpel are ſtrict. We can only caution them, not to miſtake thus: and beg they would have a more ſerious Regard, on the one Side, to their future Happineſs; on the other, to their preſent Comfort. It grieves us to think of the Terrors, that we may ſometimes occaſion thoſe to ſuffer, who have no Need to ſuffer any at all. But we muſt of Neceſſity give out the ſtrongeſt Warnings againſt the greateſt Danger: and run the Riſque, if we cannot avoid it, of making a few good Perſons uneaſy without Cauſe, rather than leave many bad ones aſleep in fatal Self-flattery. For indeed the Doctrine of Forgiveneſs, though in

itſelf the moſt ingenuous Motive to thankful Piety and Obedience, is too often moſt diſingenuouſly perverted to encourage Tranſgreſſion. Repentance, Men argue, is ſure to obtain Pardon: and Pardon reſtores us to the State we were in before we did amiſs. What Need have we then to ſcruple going a little Wrong, when the Method of ſetting all right again immediately is ſo plain before us? But, in Reality, true Repentance, a thorough Change of Temper and Purpoſe, manifeſted by a Courſe of ſuitable Conduct, will be found, neither a ſhort, nor an eaſy Work; but one exceeding the Power of Man, without the Help of God. And not to ſay, how uncertain it is, whether God will give theſe artful Contrivers Time to repent effectually, what Proſpect is there in the leaſt, that they will have a Heart to do it? When once they have been ſo deliberately baſe and wicked, as to rebel againſt him for that very Reaſon, which ought, of all others, to have made them dutiful to him; where is the Likelihood, that they will ever become ſo honeſt and good, as to return and ſerve him faithfully? No Alteration requires a larger Share of his Grace to effect it: and no Sinners

have

have leſs Ground to expect any Share of it, than theſe. But were it ever ſo probable, that even ſuch Offenders might come to amend their Doings, yet there is an awful Obſervation, ariſing from the Hiſtory before us, which remains to be inſiſted on,

V. That Wickedneſs, even after it is forſaken, and after it is forgiven, produces nevertheleſs very often Conſequences ſo lamentable, that for this Cauſe, amongſt others, Innocence is greatly preferable to the ſincereſt and completeſt Repentance, that ever was.

In the very ſame Breath, that *Nathan* tells *David, the Lord had put away his Sin*, he tells him alſo of a trying Affliction, and a very trying one it proved, that he ſhould immediately undergo, on Account of that Sin. *Howbeit, becauſe by this Deed thou haſt given great Occaſion to the Enemies of the Lord to blaſpheme, the Child, that is born unto thee, ſhall ſurely die*[m]. Nor could the moſt fervent Interceſſions of the Royal Penitent reverſe the Decree. Nay, the threatening Prediction, which the Prophet made to him before his Repentance, that becauſe *he had killed Uriah with the Sword, the Sword ſhould not depart from his Houſe*; and

m 2 Sam. xii. 14.

as he had polluted his Wife, his own should be polluted in the Sight of the Sun[n], was permitted to befall him, notwithſtanding his Repentance, with great Exactneſs. Nor doth there need much Reflexion upon what paſſes in the World to ſee, that Providence, to this Day, frequently ſuffers Events of a like Nature to happen: partly to complete the Humiliation of the Sinner, partly that others may *hear and fear*[o].

Sometimes no immediate Connexion between the Tranſgreſſion and the Suffering is viſible, that it may ſeem to be the Hand of God, rather than a natural Effect; though indeed, would Men conſider, every Effect proceeds from his Hand: but commonly they are cloſely linked, to deter Men from committing Iniquity, by ſhewing them before-hand, what Fruits they muſt expect it to produce. Indeed, were only the Pain inſeparable from Repentance, the Feeling of having done ill and deſerved ill, to diſtinguiſh the Condition of him who returns to his Duty, from his who has always adhered to it; the Diſtinction would be very intereſting and important. For how wide is the Difference between hating and approving ourſelves: between thinking of God with Dread and Shame,

[n] 2 Sam. xii. 9—12. [o] Deut. xiii. 11.

and

and rejoicing in him as *our Truſt from our Youth*[p], *and our Portion for ever*[q]*!* But long after Peace is reſtored within, which yet will never be ſo reſtored to great Offenders, as not to leave Matter of melancholy Reflexion; long after Penitents are at Eaſe with Reſpect to their future State; afflicting Conſequences, with Reſpect to the preſent, will flow from what they have done amiſs. Often they have hurt themſelves, alienated their Friends, loſt their Time and Opportunities of doing well in the World, injured their Characters, their Fortunes, their Healths: often they have hurt others, ſet miſchievous Examples, inticed, betrayed, oppreſſed, provoked thoſe around them, and deſtroyed, perhaps, by ſhort Follies, what the Endeavours of the reſt of their Days will never be able to repair. Theſe, indeed, are Conſiderations, under which they ſhould not deſpond: but ſurely others ought to take Warning from them, and learn of how unſpeakable Value it is, to *keep Innocency, and take Heed to the Thing that is right*[r], from the very firſt. Life was not intended to be led inconſiſtently; one Part in doing Wrong, the other in being ſorry for it. Uniform Obe-

[p] Pſal. lxxi. 5. [q] Ib. lxxiii. 16. [r] Ib. xxxvii. 38.

dience

dience is our Maker's Demand: and whoever departs from it wilfully, though he may return, will assuredly be made to *know and see*, one Way or other, that it is *a Thing evil and bitter, that he hath forsaken the Lord his God*[a]. Let these then, who experience this in themselves, submit to it with Patience, and revere his Justice: let those, who see it in others, thankfully make Use of the Instruction it was graciously designed to give them; and let us all preserve a lively Sense upon our Souls, that *Evil pursueth Sinners, but to the righteous Good shall be repaid*[b].

[a] Jer. ii. 19. [b] Prov. xiii. 21.

SERMON XV.

EPH. V. 11.

And have no Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darkness: but rather reprove them.

IF the Practice of their Duty were general amongst Men, it would appear to all of us as we come forward into Life, notwithstanding our present Proneness to sinful Indulgences, extremely natural and easy. For as its Reasonableness always recommends it to our Understandings, and its Amiableness to our Affections, when unbiassed: so, in these Circumstances, the public Example of Goodness would engage our Imitation, the universal esteem of it excite our Ambition, and its beneficial Consequences plainly shew it to be our true present Interest. Allurements to unlawful Pleasures would then be comparatively few; Provocations to mutual Injuries none; Consciousness of right Behaviour would make Men pleased with themselves; reciprocal Acts of Justice and Kindness would

make

make them happy in each other; and Experience, that their Being was a Bleſſing to them, would produce in their Souls affectionate Sentiments of reverential Gratitude to the bountiful Author of it. Such we ſhould have found the World, if Sin had not entered into it: and ſuch we might ſtill in a good Meaſure bring it to be, if we would; if moſt of us did not, beſides filling our own Lives with Guilt and Miſery, contribute, by a Variety of wrong Behaviour, to render our Fellow-creatures alſo wicked and wretched. This we all ſee and feel to be the real State of Things: but how do we act upon it? We complain grievouſly of each other, for the Faults which we each of us go on to commit; we complain even of Providence, becauſe the World is—only what we have made it; and alledge the Miſconduct of our Neighbours for a Defence of our own, inſtead of trying to mend ourſelves or them: whereas, evidently our Concern is, to *have no Fellowſhip with the unfruitful Works of Darkneſs, but rather reprove them*; to preſerve our own Souls from the epidemic Diſtemper, and warn thoſe around us of the Danger of being infected. But it is with the Security of our perſonal Innocence, that we are to begin: without

without which we ſhall ſeldom in earneſt attempt, and ſcarce ever ſucceſsfully proſecute, the Reformation of any one elſe: nor will the greateſt Succeſs in ſuch Endeavours avail us, if, as our Apoſtle expreſſes it, *when we have preached to others, we ourſelves are Caſt-aways*[a].

The firſt and principal Conſideration then is, how to avoid any *Fellowſhip with the unfruitful*, a gentle Term, which means pernicious, *Works of Darkneſs*. Now a main Point of Caution againſt all Sorts of Peril is to know, from whence chiefly we are to apprehend it. But who can ſay, from what Quarter our Virtue runs the greateſt Riſque, in a World ſo thick ſet round with various Temptations: where all Vices are ſo common, that it ſeems a Matter of Courſe, and almoſt of Neceſſity, to indulge one or another; and the Majority of the guilty is ſo large, that each conſiders himſelf, in ſome Degree, as ſafe in the Crowd even from divine Diſpleaſure, *numbering himſelf amongſt the Multitude of Sinners*, and not *remembering that Wrath will not tarry long*[b]: where our Eyes and our Ears continually preſent to our Imaginations Crimes, of which elſe we ſhould never have thought, and ſuggeſt eaſy Methods of attaining

[a] 1 Cor. ix. 27. [b] Ecclus. vii. 16.

what

what we believed to be as impracticable, as we know it to be unlawful: where the Prosperity of ill Men so strongly prompts us to envy their Condition, imitate their Presumptuousness, and doubt of a superintending Power: where every natural Inclination that we have meets with something to inflame it beyond Bounds, or turn it aside from its proper Object: where Fear of Inconveniences threatening upright Conduct, and Hope of gaining Advantages by Deviations from it, work within us continually: where Injuries, real or fancied, are daily provoking us to injure or hate in Return; and even Friendship and kind Affection, meeting too often with undeserving Objects, make us partial and unfair, subservient to the Purposes of the bad or injudicious, and criminally negligent of the Merits of the worthy?

Here is already an alarming List of Dangers: and yet one Source of them remains unmentioned, so very fruitful, that probably it brings more of us to Ruin than all the rest: I mean, our strong Tendency to follow whatever Precedents are set us: which being the great Seducer of Mankind to *have Fellowship with* one another in *the unfruitful Works of Darkness,*

Darkneſs, I ſhall confine myſelf to the Conſideration of it in the Sequel of this Diſcourſe.

A Diſpoſition to fall in with what we ſee others do is one of the earlieſt natural Principles that we exert: and in itſelf a very beneficial one. For by Means of it we learn, with Eaſe and Pleaſure, a Multitude of Things neceſſary or ſerviceable in Life: conform readily to the Inclinations of thoſe about us in a thouſand Matters of Indifference, and from mutual Likeneſs become mutually agreeable. By the ſame Means alſo, were Patterns of Piety and Virtue more frequent, or we more attentive to them, we might be excited, as undoubtedly it was deſigned we ſhould, to copy, and even rival, each other's laudable Qualities. But where Things are capable of contrary Uſes, we generally make the worſt of them: and in no Caſe more than this. The Example of Evil, in a corrupted World, is by much the ofteneſt in our View: which the weak and indolent imitate without Reflexion; the good-humoured and pliable are drawn after them by the Deſire of pleaſing, though in wrong Ways; the vain and ambitious by Fondneſs of excelling though in culpable Attainments; and almoſt all by the Shame of Singularity and Dread of Ridicule:

till the Numbers of the faulty being thus become abundantly sufficient to keep one another in Countenance, Custom refuses to let its Authority be any longer examined, and sets up itself as the sole Rule of Conduct.

For, even when we seem to act the most entirely from Opinions and Dispositions of our own, these, upon Inquiry, will be frequently found to derive, if not their Original, at least a great Part of their Strength, from the Deference that we pay to the Notions and Practice of the World. Thus Men speak and think slightly of Religion, often without imagining they know any Objection of Weight against it: and yet how they can have the very lowest Degree of Belief in it, and not believe it to be an Affair of the utmost Importance, is quite inconceivable: but notwithstanding they treat it, without Scruple, as a slight Matter, because they see it commonly treated so. But this Degree of Depravity is not universal. We, perhaps, may blame those who do so, and with Marks of great Seriousness profess ourselves Christians: yet, it may be, are easy in transgressing, in a higher Degree or a lower, as Occasion offers, almost every Precept of Christianity, because others, who call themselves Christians also, do the same Thing.

Thing. We acknowledge that we are ſoon to leave this Earth, and give an Account to God of the Part which we have acted upon it: yet perceiving, that moſt People about us overlook theſe awful Truths, we can do ſo too, as abſolutely, as if we had no Concern in them. And, to be a little more particular: what is it that makes us in our common Diſcourſe ſo regardleſs of Equity and Humanity, ſo eager to ſpeak Evil and propagate Scandal? Surely not always Malignity of Heart: and certainly very ſeldom any peculiar Knowledge of the Caſe, or Intereſt in it. But ſuch is the reigning Turn of Converſation, which we are wicked and weak enough to adopt and promote, at the very Time that we inveigh bitterly againſt it, and ſuffer grievouſly by it. Again: how many are there who trifle away their Days, in thinking of and doing Nothing that tends to any one good Purpoſe, only becauſe ſuch Trifling is faſhionable! How many affect Follies and Vices, to which, at the Bottom, they have little or no Liking, which are highly prejudicial, and will probably be fatal to them, merely becauſe they are in Vogue: and for no wiſer a Reaſon will perſevere in them, when Nature cries aloud to have them left off! How many diſtreſs and undo

themſelves and their Families, by imprudently vying with the Luxury and Expenſiveneſs of thoſe about them, nay, of thoſe above them! And, in general, from what is it elſe, than taking it on Truſt from common Perſuaſion, that poſſeſſing the Things of this World is Happineſs; though we not only may obſerve the contrary in all whom we know, but feel it in ourſelves; that we purſue them through Sins and through Sufferings of all Kinds, and admire and deteſt one another on Account of them, at the Rate we do? What, indeed, elſe could ſupport the Abſurdity of ſeeking our chief Good where plainly it is not, but that we all ſee one another do ſo, and will perſuade ourſelves, againſt the fulleſt evidence, that ſo univerſal an Attachment muſt be well grounded?

But the Example of a ſmall Part of Mankind is often ſufficient to lead us into ſtrange Errors. Where Party-zeal of any Kind prevails, into what monſtrous opinions of Men and Things, what utter Diſregard to all Truth and Juſtice, to public Spirit and Humanity, will Men run one after another! Indeed they will do Things, when united in Bodies, which, taken ſingly, they would abhor: nay, will think they juſtify their own Behaviour completely, by alledging only, that it is the ſame with that of their Oppoſers,

Oppoſers, whom they condemn as the worſt of Men. Sometimes a leſs Authority than this proves able to miſguide us: and a blind Prepoſſeſſion in favour of a few Perſons, or a ſingle one, ſhall ſeduce us into a very unjuſtifiable Imitation; and even make us, by the Meanneſs of it, contemptible, or, by carrying it too far, guilty, when what we meant to copy was commendable, or however innocent.

Without ſpecifying more Inſtances, or enlarging on theſe, the Miſchiefs of being injudiciouſly *conformed to this World*[c] appear ſo conſiderable, as to make the Remedies which can be found for it extremely deſirable. Now Remedies of Miſchiefs vary with their Cauſes: which in this Caſe are numerous.

1. Some *follow the Multitude to do Evil*[d] from mere Inconſiderateneſs: poor Creatures, greatly to be pitied, and yet ſeverely reproved. For, ſurely, enough depends on our chuſing right in Life, to make us think about it: and there is Appearance enough of Errors in the common Practice, to give us no little Diffidence in a Matter of ſuch Moment. But Mankind in general being thoughtleſs, each Individual, as he goes on with the reſt, finding few or none different

[c] Rom. xii. 2. [d] Exod. xxiii. 2.

from himſelf to compare with, is hardly ſenſible of his own being ſo. Yet would we, in Imagination, ſtep out of the preſent Scene of Things for a while, conſider ourſelves as mere Spectators, and view the Courſe of them as they paſs before us, how amazing would the Sight be! The plain and only Way to Happineſs, through the faithful Cultivation of Piety and Virtue, almoſt unanimouſly neglected: Nations and Ages treading, in mutual implicit Reliance, Paths leading to Deſtruction: the leſs faulty ſurprizingly apt to be diſſipated in a Hurry of Amuſements, or plod on in worldly Buſineſs without higher Attentions: the reſt, by irregular Paſſions, and unlawful Purſuits, making themſelves and their Neighbours as wretched at preſent as they well can, and at the ſame Time providing for unſpeakably greater Miſery hereafter: every Generation reminded, every ſingle Perſon ſeeing, on one Occaſion or another, in how wrong a Courſe they are; yet ſhutting their Eyes again, and going forward blindfold: none almoſt taking Warning by the Fate of his Predeceſſors; but each leaving, in his Turn, an uſeleſs Admonition of his own to ſuch as come in his Stead. *This their Way is their Folly: yet their Poſte-*

rity

rity approve their Sayings[e]. And ſhall we be of the Number of thoſe who act thus: or rather aſſert our Right to judge for ourſelves, where it concerns us ſo nearly? Such is the Uſage of the World: but is it the Dictate of Conſcience, is it the Road to Happineſs? The Multitude, *blind Leaders of the blind*[f], have they Reaſon, have they Scripture, have they the final Event of Things, to juſtify them? If not, let us chuſe a ſafer Guidance; and apply the real Rule of Life to direct our Steps: aſk ourſelves often, what we are doing, and what it tends to? Stop ſhort wherever we diſcern Ground for Suſpicion; beware of plauſible Pleas, for they often colour over the worſt Actions; beware of indiſcreet Compliances, for they border nearly upon criminal ones; and ever remember the Son of *Sirach's* Advice: *Go not in a Way, wherein thou mayeſt fall. Be not confident in a plain Way*[g]. But above all let us beware of ourſelves: and recollecting, as we have but too much Cauſe, our natural Supineneſs, and Forgetfulneſs of the Cautions that we ſo often receive, *give the more earneſt Heed to the Things which we have*

[e] Pſal. xlix. 13. [f] Matth. xv. 14. [g] Ecclus xxxii. 21, 22.

heard, lest at any Time we let them slip[h]; and *set our Hearts unto the Words of God's Law, for it is not a vain Thing for us, because it is our Life*[i].

2. Others there are, not absolutely thoughtless about their Conduct, but distrustful of their own Judgment: born down by so great an Authority, as the Practice of all Mankind appears to be, against Seriousness in Religion and Strictness in Virtue. But, universal as this Practice may seem, there are many Exceptions from it amongst all Ranks, and some, God be praised, in the highest, of exemplary Christians, who, *in the Midst of a crooked and perverse Generation, shine as Lights in the World*[k]. But were the Apostacy more general than it is, yet being the Effect of mere Inconsiderateness or ungoverned Passions, what Weight can there be in the most perfect Agreement of Persons thus influenced? Or if still the Multitude together look formidable, separate them; and consider singly, of whom the Whole is composed. The much larger Part will be acknowledged at first Sight to be such, as we should be ashamed once to think of taking for our Directors, in a Point of any Consequence. And for the rest: the rich and great are rather peculiarly exposed to

[h] Heb. ii. 1. [i] Deut. xxxii. 46, 47. [k] Phil. ii. 15.

Temptation,

Temptation, and, of Courſe, to fall, than qualified to diſcover and reliſh thoſe momentous Truths and Rules of Life, which Humility and Retirement into ourſelves beſt diſpoſe us to receive. The learned and knowing are liable to be miſled into wrong Judgments by the Vanity of judging differently from common Men; nor do they always act agreeably to what they inwardly think. And the reputed wiſe and able very frequently have never conſidered in earneſt what the true Wiſdom of Life is, but only buſied themſelves with a ſilly Cunning to attain what they have raſhly and falſely taken for the End, at which they were to aim.

But further: this univerſal Conſent, pleaded againſt obſerving the Precepts of Religion, is, when examined, no Conſent at all. For as the Vices of Men are contrary to each other, and every vicious Temper is full of Inconſiſtencies within itſelf: no one immoral Courſe will ever be generally approved, nor almoſt any one immoral Perſon continue long of the ſame Opinion. The only Thing, in which we ſhall find them agree, is that, which they all by Turns own, that the Conduct of the virtuous is right; and their own, wrong. Here, therefore, a pious

a pious and discreet Man will easily raise an intestine War amongst the Enemy: defend himself against one Side by the Authority of the other; indeed against all Sides by the Authority of all: and in conclusion resolve, slighting and pitying a divided giddy Crowd, *in every good Work to trust his own Soul; for this is the Keeping of the Commandments*[1].

3. Another strong Inducement to have Fellowship with the bad Customs of the World, is Desire of being esteemed by it. But do the vicious really esteem one another? Do they not almost always hate or despise one another? Or suppose that, for joining in their Sins and Absurdities, you were sure to receive their Applause as your Reward. Perhaps the whole Meaning of it is at the Bottom no more than this: they want to keep themselves in Countenance, being conscious that they have Occasion for it, by adding as many as they can to their Number; and their good Opinion of you is thinking you weak enough to be drawn in for one. Or perhaps the Superiority, which your Innocence gives you over them, is painful to them; and they would fain bring you down to their own Level. Or they have some interested

[1] Ecclus xxxii. 23.

Design

Design upon you, or they consider you as an Instrument fitted to amuse and entertain them; and so extol you, while they deride you. This, you see, is not being admired: it is being made a Tool. But were it otherwise: consider a little; what can such Admiration be worth? How long will it be likely to last? And what must the Consequences prove, now and to Eternity? Why then, instead of courting outward Regard from those, who inwardly condemn themselves, do you not chuse to be respected by the wise and good, to enjoy the Testimony of your own Conscience, and to secure the important Approbation of him, who hath said, *Them that honour me, I will honour: and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed*[m]?

4. A further Motive, which yet more powerfully inclines too many to unlawful Compliances, is false Good-nature and Shame. They have so excessive a Flexibility of Temper, that they know not how to stand out against what the Practice of the World recommends, and especially what their Acquaintance invite and press them to, though they ever so clearly see the Impropriety of it, and have ever so firmly

[m] 1 Sam. ii. 30.

resolved the contrary. Unhappy Creatures, betrayed by Dispositions, almost virtuous, into Vice! The truly good-natured Part, would they but reflect, is to lead others in the right Way, not to follow them in the wrong: the truly shameful Behaviour, not to be resolute, obstinate, if Tempters please to call it so, in consulting our present and future Welfare. *Beware of Evil*, saith the Son of *Sirach*, *and be not ashamed, when it concerneth thy Soul. For there is a Shame, that bringeth Sin: and there is a Shame which is Glory and Grace. Accept no Person against thy Soul: and let not the Reverence of any Man cause thee to fall*[n]. *There is, that destroyeth his own Soul through Bashfulness, and by accepting of Persons, overthroweth himself*[o]. But they, who have the Misfortune to be of this Make, should by no Means trust to their own most solemn Purposes, or even Vows. Their chief Safety is in Flight; in avoiding, to their utmost, such Company and such Things, though ever so agreeable, as may endanger their Innocence; and keeping at a Distance from Temptation, till they can bear it better. Thus they will escape at once the Uneasiness of resisting and the Hazard of yielding, and increase

[n] Ecclus iv. 20, 21, 22. [o] Ecclus xx. 22.

their

their Strength gradually by a cautious Exercise of it: provided they rest not in human Means only, but, with Faith and Humility unfeigned, apply for and depend on the divine Assistance, promised through Jesus Christ; the Necessity of which for every Person, in every Case, we presume you always understand, and for that sole Reason we do not always express it.

5. With this inward Weakness is commonly joined an Apprehension of Difficulties from without: of public Dislike and Censure for condemning the public Taste by a different Conduct; or at least of much Ridicule, a Thing full as hard to be borne, for doing conscientiously what the World despises, and abstaining from what it doth without Scruple. But let not the Danger of Censure appear to any one so frightful. Indeed if Persons take absurd or indifferent Observances to be great Duties; if they are strict in the Performance of one Duty, and grossly negligent of others; or if to the Performance of many there be added, either a vain Desire of making their own Goodness remarkable, or the provoking Sin of Uncharitableness towards others, they must not expect very favourable Treatment. But an uniformly good Christian, without Superstition,

without Affectation, and without Sourneſs, which are ſurely none of them Virtues, may *live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly in this preſent World*[p], bad as it is, ever ſo long, without any great Danger, either of making himſelf Enemies, by doing no Harm and as much Good as he can, or of falling into Contempt, for acting only as every Man in his Heart knows he himſelf ought to act. But if ever this prove otherwiſe, inſtead of being *ſhaken in* our *Minds*[q] by it, let us confier, how much more Cenſure we ſhould incur and deſerve by a vicious Life, to ſay Nothing of other Inconveniences: and above all, let us conſider that infinitely more important Cenſure, which both we, and our Scorners, are ſhortly to undergo: and ſince, as St. *Peter* argues, they who *think it ſtrange, that we run not with them to the ſame Exceſs of Riot, ſpeaking Evil of us, ſhall give Account to him, that is ready to judge the Quick and the Dead*; let us *arm ourſelves with this Mind, that we live not our Time in the Fleſh to the Luſts of Men, but to the Will of God*[r].

As for the Ridicule, which ludicrous Scoffers love to throw upon Religion: we may avoid much of it by Prudence, and deſpiſe the reſt

p Tit. ii. 12. q 2 Theſſ. ii. 2. r 1 Pet. iv. 1, 2, 4, 5.

with

with Eaſe. It falls heavieſt on the Pretences to Piety made by the vicious; and we ſhall ſeldom be thought ſuch, if we are not; or on the Reſervedneſs and Formality of ſome, who are good. Now indeed it is never adviſable to go the utmoſt Lengths of what may, ſtrictly ſpeaking, be juſt lawful; they adjoin ſo very cloſely on what is forbidden: yet there is a contrary Extreme, an immoderate Suſpiciouſneſs of innocent Compliances. And they, who indulge it, lay a heavier Burthen on themſelves than they need, perhaps than they will ſupport without ſinking under it. But at leaſt they rob their own Minds of that Serenity and Chearfulneſs, which they might and ought to have enjoyed: they diſguiſe Religion under a gloomy uninviting Appearance, which is great Pity; and furniſh the profane with a grievous Handle for expoſing both them and it; till perhaps they at Length grow aſhamed of their Profeſſion, and make a ſudden Exchange of their exceſſive Rigour for the worſe Errors of Libertiniſm and Infidelity. Therefore, in a moderate Degree, on proper Occaſions, let us not be backward to bear a Part in ſuch Cuſtoms of the World, as we are ſure we ſafely may: and let it, if poſſible, be a graceful one. On the

the other Hand, whatever, though harmleſs in itſelf, may be a Snare to us, or by our Means to others, let us abſtain from it indeed reſolutely, but abſtain with an eaſy Air and Manner: keep our Reaſons to ourſelves, rather than be eager to mention them: or mention them, if it may do Good, without exaggerating or inſiſting too vehemently upon any Thing; but ſo as may beſt convince Men of the Solidity of our Judgement, and Reaſonableneſs of our Conduct. Behaving thus, we may well hope to become Objects, at leaſt after a while, of Reſpect inſtead of Deriſion, to which no Part of genuine Piety is on any Account liable. And they, who ſet themſelves to make a Jeſt of it, might without Difficulty, if the Seriouſneſs of their Caſe, and ſometimes Pity, ſometimes juſt Indignation, did not prevent it, have that Weapon turned upon them, and be proved the moſt abſurd of all human Beings. Their Scrupulouſneſs of admitting the moſt indubitable Truths of Religion; and Readineſs at the ſame Time to acquieſce in the wildeſt Imaginations, that are unfavourable to it: their Schemes of making themſelves eaſy by counteracting the Dictates of their own Conſciences; and happy by tranſgreſſing the Laws of infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs, enforced by almighty

almighty Power: their Delight in the Hopes of exiſting no longer than the Space of this tranſitory Life, and their Haſte to ruin Health, Fortune and Reputation, all that can afford them Enjoyment, in the very Beginning of Life: their earneſt Purſuits of what they frequently deſpiſe at the Time, and almoſt always nauſeate ſoon after they have attained it; and the tormenting inward Conflicts, that they often experience, between two Paſſions, both of them perhaps fooliſh, and both pernicious, which ſhall be preferred: ſurely theſe Things, and above all their triumphing in the Wiſdom of theſe Things, and inſulting thoſe who are ſtupid enough to follow the Rules of plain Reaſon, and the Directions of God himſelf from Heaven, as the beſt Guides to their preſent and future Well-being, might, without any great Effort, be ſo deſcribed, as to retort on their own Heads a double Share of the Contempt, which they are ſo liberal in throwing about them. But however unwilling or unfit a wiſe Man may be to *anſwer Fools according to their Folly* *, at leaſt he will ſee it to be unworthy of his Notice; and go on, unconcerned, through the impotent Attacks of it, in the ſteady Practice of *whatſoever Things*

* Prov. xxvi. 4, 5.

are true and honest, whatsoever Things are lovely and of good Report[t]; recollecting daily that awful and repeated Declaration of the holy *Jesus, Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my Words in this adulterous and sinful Generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father with the holy Angels*[u]. *Then shall the righteous Man*, as the Book of *Wisdom* beautifully expresses it, *stand in great Boldness before the Face of such as made no Account of his Labours. And they, repenting and groaning for Anguish of Spirit, shall say within themselves, This was he, whom we had some Time in Derision, and a Proverb of Reproach. We Fools, accounted his Life Madness, and his End to be without Honour. How is he numbered among the Children of God, and his Lot is amongst the Saints! Therefore have we erred from the Way of Truth, and wearied ourselves in the Way of Wickedness and Destruction. What hath our Pride profited us, and what Good hath our Vaunting brought us? All those Things are passed away like a Shadow; and as the Dust that is blown away with the Wind. But the righteous live for evermore: their Reward also is with the Lord, and the Care of them is with the Most High*[w].

[t] Phil. iv. 8. [u] Mark viii. 38. [w] Wisd. v.

SERMON XVI.

EPH. V. 11.

And have no Fellowſhip with the unfruitful Works of Darkneſs, but rather reprove them.

THE Prevalence of Impiety and Immorality in the World, hath not only made the original Duties of Mankind more difficult, by increaſing the Temptations to tranſgreſs them, but added to their Number many new Obligations of great Importance, relating partly to the Concern of preſerving ourſelves, partly to the Charity of guarding others, from the general Infection. Our own Preſervation is doubtleſs to be the firſt Object of our Attention, as we are primarily intruſted with, and anſwerable for, our own Perſons, and have by Nature the ſtrongeſt Solicitude for our own Happineſs. But Zeal for that of our Fellow-Creatures ought certainly to fill the ſecond Place in our Breaſts; and is a Duty much too little regarded, even by the good; conſidering

how indiſpenſably both Religion and Humanity, and indeed our common Intereſt, require us to promote what is right and fit, and reſtrain each other from Sin and Ruin, by all ſuch Methods as we properly can. For every one is by no Means qualified to uſe every Method: and therefore, without prudent Reflexion, many may both labour and ſuffer much, without any Proſpect of its turning to Account; nay, may involve themſelves in Guilt by immoderate Eagerneſs to reform their Neighbours. But, though all muſt conſult their own Strength and Opportunities, and leave to thoſe who are better able, and to the Providence of God, what they find themſelves unequal to: there ſtill remains to every one of us a proper Share of this great Work; and we ought to be faithfully diligent, within the Sphere of our Influence, be it larger or ſmaller, to diſcountenance Wickedneſs and encourage Piety and Virtue, by all thoſe Ways, to which God, having adapted our Powers and Circumſtances, hath conſequently called us. And as theſe vary greatly, ſo the Apoſtle hath given Room in the Text for treating of them all, by mentioning the loweſt Inſtance of due Care in this Reſpect, *having no Fellowſhip with*

the

the unfruitful Works of Darkness; and the highest, *reproving them.*

I. The first of these, barely not partaking in the bad Actions that others commit, may seem perhaps to be scarce doing any Thing for the opposite Cause. And yet, as the common Practice of Sin is the principal Plea in its Favour, it is of great Consequence to shew, that the Practice is not universal: that there are still Persons left, who fear God and love his Laws, who abhor an unworthy Deed, and despise a criminal Pleasure. The profligate, sensible that a virtuous Character is the superior one in Speculation, have Nothing left, but to question the Reality of it in Fact: and by reflecting very little, and conversing with such only, or chiefly, as are like themselves, they become by Degrees almost persuaded, that all Men are wicked, and cannot be otherwise. This Opinion extinguishes Modesty, as well as deadens Conscience: they triumph in their imaginary Discovery, degrading as it is to human Nature, and insult the Vanity of those, who presume to think themselves moral Agents. It is lamentable to observe, how far they have succeeded in their monstrous Attempt to pervert the true Order of Things. While they *glory*

in their Shame[a], too many grow aſhamed of what they ought to account their Glory: would wiſh to have their Performance of religious Duties, and the Regularity of their Lives, unknown or diſbelieved, or aſcribed to ſome other Motive than Principle; or, it may be, a few faſhionable Sins imputed to them, to ſave their Reputations. By the Influence of ſuch prepoſterous Baſhfulneſs, they often become at Length what they deſire to ſeem: at leaſt they ſuffer others to fall, whom the Authority of their Example might have ſupported, and confirm the profane and vicious in their wrong Notions and Courſes. Another Inducement, beſides Cowardice, to this improper Conduct, is an Abhorrence of being thought oſtentatious: which hath the more Weight, becauſe in all Matters, and eſpecially in Religion, whoever takes uncommon Pains to make a Shew, will be ſuſpected of not having much Reality. But if Affectation on that Hand be a Fault, Affectation on the other is a greater; and the plain Rule of Behaviour lies between them: that every Chriſtian go through his Chriſtian Duty with Uprightneſs and Simplicity; neither deſiring to bring the private

[a] Phil. iii. 19.

Parts

Parts of it into public View, nor labouring to make a Secret of his Faith and Practice in Cases, where they would of Course be seen. A natural artless Procedure will as certainly vindicate itself, as dishonest Contrivances will be detected. And therefore let no one fear to be thought, or, when Occasion requires, to let all Mankind perceive that he is rightly thought, religious and conscientious. The Regulation of our Appetites and Passions, by Reason and good Sense, can never be a Ground of Contempt. *Doing Justice and loving Mercy*, is honoured throughout the Earth. And though it should be added of the same Person, who lives by these Rules, that he also *walks humbly with his God*[b]: one doth not discern, why that should lessen the good Opinion pre-conceived of him; or how these who every Day with abject Servility are worshipping others, no better than themselves, for trifling Interests, can pretend to think it Meanness in him, that he honours and adores the Maker and Judge of all. Nay, let it be said further, that he adores him suitably to the Directions laid down in Scripture; and, conscious of his own Ignorance, Guilt, and Weakness, is willing thankfully to accept Instruction, Pardon, Assistance,

[b] Mic. vi. 8.

and eternal Life, the free Gifts of his heavenly Father, on the Giver's Terms, through Faith in the Merits of *Jesus Christ*, and the Grace of the Holy Spirit; still who hath a Right to blame him, unless he can prove, which no one ever hath done or will, that this is not the Way to Happiness here and hereafter, and that any other is? A virtuous, a religious, a Christian Character then, as it always deserves, will generally command Respect: its Amiableness, its Importance to public, to private Welfare, will be visible. And, in Proportion as Numbers appear possessed of it, the vicious will be awed into Silence, and the modester Part of them at least into outward Imitation, which may produce in Time, through God's Grace, inward Seriousness. But, however these may be affected, all the well-inclined will rejoice in the Protection, and improve by the Example, of such declared Friends. Almost every one may do some Good in this Way, and possibly far more than he imagines, merely by maintaining openly an uniform Tenour of pious and moral Behaviour, without taking any Pains to call the Attention of Mankind to it. But the rich, the noble, the powerful, the learned, the ingenious, the admired, those especially in whom several of these Advantages are united,

may,

may, barely by manifesting themselves to be such as they ought, each of them singly reform or preserve Multitudes of their Inferiors; and a Number of them combined oppose and put to Flight the reigning Vices of the whole Age in which they live.

Hence it is, that our Saviour hath laid so great a Stress on the Duty of *confessing him before Men*[c]; and exhorted his Disciples thus, *Ye are the Light of the World; let your Light so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works, and glorify your Father, which is in Heaven*[d]. Hence also St. *Paul*, alluding probably to the Expressions of his Master, though not present when they were used, saith of those who are *blameless and harmless, the Sons of God, without Rebuke*, that they *shine in the Midst of others as Lights in the World, holding forth the Word of Life*[e].

II. After exhibiting a Pattern of Goodness in ourselves, our next Care should be to promote in a proper Manner, on all fit Occasions, the Esteem of whatever is good in others. The Generality attend not enough to moral Excellencies, and too often consider them in a wrong Point of View: by which Means they overlook, or sometimes conceive Prejudices

[c] Matth. x. 32. [d] Matth. v. 14, 16. [e] Phil. ii. 15, 16.

against,

againſt, what they would elſe honour, and be proud to imitate. Therefore, whenever favourable Opportunities preſent themſelves, they ſhould be inſtantly ſeized; and the Rightneſs, the Lovelineſs, the beneficial Fruits of each Virtue ſhewn to ſuch as are not yet ſufficiently ſenſible of them: the Ridicule, which hath been unjuſtly thrown on ſome Duties, taken off; and the Miſrepreſentations, which have rendered them contemptible, rectified: the Plea of exceſſive Severity, urged againſt others, confuted; and the real Difficulty of practiſing them proved to be eligible, by the Shortneſs of its Continuance, and the bleſſed Effects of overcoming it. At the ſame Time we ſhould exemplify theſe Truths, whenever we can, in the Characters of the worthy: on whom we ſhould be always endeavouring to turn the Eyes of our Acquaintance; to place them and their Actions in an advantageous Light; to vindicate them from Aſperſions; to convince as many as poſſible, how much more valuable, and conducive both to private and public Welfare, a religious and honeſt Principle is, than the moſt ſhining and envied Accompliſhments, when ſeparated from it. Accordingly it ſhould be our Study to cheriſh and recommend ſuch as are eminent for this Merit; to ſupport

ſupport and prefer their Intereſts; to make them known and acceptable one to another; and forward amongſt them a general Character, that above all Things would gain them Reſpect and Succeſs. But,

III. Whilſt we are thus labouring to encourage Virtue and Religion, we must be extremely cautious that we obſtruct not our own Work, by favouring any Sort of Wickedness: that we never patronize, for the Sake of our own Gratification, what may probably tempt unguarded Innocence into Sin, or furniſh the ill-inclined with the Means of committing it: that we contribute not to raiſe any bad or even ſuſpicious Perſon to a Condition of doing Harm: that we protect not the guilty with our Intereſt or Power, nor varniſh over their Faults from Conſiderations of private Intereſt or Friendſhip: but fairly ſuffer Truth to prevail, and Crimes to be detected, as they ought. For whatever particular good Purpoſes may ſeem, and perhaps but ſeem, to be ſerved at preſent by the contrary Policy, they will never counterbalance the general Miſchiefs ariſing from it. Further, we muſt not pay Court to, or delight in, the vicious, for the Sake of ſome Wit and Pleaſantry, ſome ſuperficial Agree-

6 ableneſs,

ableneſs, that ſets off their Vices: we muſt never even ſeem to look on either Villainy or Debauchery, as Objects of Mirth only; extol the entertaining Qualities of him, that ruins others by them; or the Abilities of the Man, that uſes them to his Neighbour's Wrong. Elſe we ſhall teach thoſe around us to eſteem and emulate them: indeed we ſhall accuſtom ourſelves to regard ſuch Characters as accompliſhed and reſpectable, not as deteſtable; and come, at Length, inſtead of pitying, to deſpiſe and ridicule thoſe who ſuffer by them: thus wickedly augmenting the Triumph of the one, and the Affliction of the other. *David* mentions it amongſt the diſtinguiſhing Marks of him, who *ſhall abide in the Tabernacle of the Lord, and dwell in his holy Hill*, that *in his Eyes a vile Perſon is contemned; but he honoureth them, that fear the Lord*[f]. And St. *Paul* ſeems to make it in ſome Senſe a leſs Crime for a Man to live immorally himſelf, than to rejoice in others that live ſo: *who, knowing the Judgement of God*, ſaith he, *that they, which commit ſuch Things, are worthy of Death, not only do the ſame, but have Pleaſure in them that do them*[g]. We have from Nature ſtrong

[f] Pſal. xv. 1, 4. [g] Rom. i. 32.

Appetites

Appetites and Paſſions in our corrupted Frame, which tempt us ſo vehemently, and hurry us often ſo ſuddenly into ſome Sins, that perhaps we may not be altogether void of Excuſe. But there is no original Principle within us, that leads us coolly and deliberately to approve them in others. This therefore can only proceed from a peculiar and wilful Depravation of Heart, equivalent to what might be produced by many repeated Acts of Tranſgreſſion.

And here it muſt be obſerved, that voluntary Intimacy with the wicked is one Degree of ſhewing Countenance to them, and ought to be avoided. Sometimes, indeed, Nearneſs of Relation, Connexions in Buſineſs, the Neceſſities of Affairs; at others, common Civility and Decency of Behaviour, which, though a weaker Tie, it may be very unadviſable to break through, oblige us to keep up Acquaintances of this Sort. And indeed what St. *Paul* obſerves of the Heathens of his Days, that if a Man would not *company with* the groſsly wicked amongſt them, *he muſt needs go out of the World*[h], is become too true even of the profeſſed Chriſtians of ours. Beſides, a reaſonable Proſpect of reforming the faulty may

[h] 1 Cor. v. 9, 10.

justify

juſtify one, eſpecially of known and confirmed Virtue, in converſing much with them, and being, what our Saviour was very truly, though maliciouſly, called, *a Friend of Publicans and Sinners*[1]. But to affect, or even permit, beyond what ſuch Reaſons require, either Friendſhips or Familiarities with habitual Tranſgreſſors of the Laws of God, is on many Accounts unallowable. On our own Account we ſhould reſolve againſt it, for the Sake of our good Name: which, in a World ſo cenſorious, it is difficult enough to preſerve, by the diſcreeteſt Behaviour, unſullied; and therefore we muſt not hope to eſcape, if by ill-choſen Company we give real Ground for a bad Opinion of us in ſome Degree; and too fair a Pretence for carrying it farther than probably we deſerve. And yet how ſoon we may come, by ſuch Imprudences, to deſerve a much worſe Opinion than we apprehend, cannot be foreſeen: conſidering, how prone both to Imitation and to Wickedneſs the human Heart is, and how much this Propenſity muſt be increaſed, when we place Crimes before it in ſo alluring a Light, as that of their [illegible]tiſed without any Scruple by our [illegible]tes. But were we ever

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ſo ſecure in all Reſpects, there is a Dignity belonging to Piety and Virtue, which ought to be ſupported; and is betrayed, when we mix unneceſſarily with the profligate and abandoned: whom beſides we thus make eaſy and harden in their unlawful Courſes; nay, give them alſo the public Credit of being regarded by us, and well with us; which may enable them to do we know not what Harm. Beſides, by ſuch undiſtinguiſhing Treatment of Men, we diſqualify ourſelves from ſhewing that Preference to the worthy, which is their Due; and lead others, more or leſs, to ſlight the Difference of Characters, and, in probable Conſequence, the Notions of Right and Wrong. *That be far from thee, to do after this Manner*; as *Abraham* ſpeaks on another Occaſion: *and that the righteous ſhould be as the wicked, that be far from thee*[k].

To ſuch Degree then, as every one can, he ought to avoid the very Appearance of theſe improper Attachments: or, if he hath failed in Point of Precaution, muſt immediately think of the Means of diſengaging himſelf. Sometimes a ſteady Adherence to our Duty is enough to effect it: and ſuch Perſons grow weary of an Acquaintance, whoſe Conduct re-

[k] Gen. xviii. 25.

proves

proves them, and whose Ears are deaf to their Solicitations. But if that proves otherwise; and either the Scandalousness of their Lives, or imminent Danger of being at length perverted by them, requires a more speedy and abrupt Step to be taken, we shall do well, on some flagrant Occasion, to renounce all Commerce with them at once: which, at the same Time that it sets us free, may possibly make on them, by the Strength of the Shock, a salutary Impression. Where the Familiarity either cannot or ought not to be broken off, the Degree of it, however, may be so moderated, or such Exceptions to it contrived in particular Instances, that, paying strictly all due Regard to them, we may be known to disapprove what they do amiss: stand at a visible Distance from the Faults of those to whom we are nearest: and be, like our blessed Lord, *holy, harmless, and undefiled, separate from Sinners*[1], though we preserve, when called to it, a Course of easy Demeanour in the Midst of them. In Proportion as our Situation will permit us to vary our Deportment from Time to Time, we may with-hold from them, when any Enormities of theirs demand it, the usual Frankness and Chearfulness

[1] Heb. vii. 26.

of

of our Converſation; and reſtore it on the Proſpect of their Amendment: we may alſo, and ſhould, be watchful to expreſs our Delight in every right Action they perform; to ſignify inoffenſively the Affliction we ſuffer when they miſbehave; and thus move their Good-nature, if any be left in them, to give us Pleaſure, not Pain, while we ſo evidently wiſh them well. But ſtill ſometimes neither theſe nor the preceding Methods can be tried, at others they are ſure or likely to prove ineffectual: and therefore

IV. We muſt have Recourſe to that, which the Apoſtle ſpecifies in the laſt Words of the Text, *reproving them.* Various Perſons, indeed, on various Accounts, we cannot *reprove for their Works of Darkneſs:* either having no Acceſs to them, or no Title to uſe that Freedom. Or at moſt, we can only convey oblique Reproof under ſome agreeable, or however inoffenſive, Diſguiſe; or make a ſmall Advance upon the Borders of plain Speech, obſerving well on which Side they are moſt acceſſible; and watching for the Seaſons, when good Diſpoſitions either prevail or may be excited. Nor ſhould we neglect any one of theſe honeſt Artifices; for the ſkilful Application

of them may possibly enable us to gain Ground, by unperceived Degrees, on their inordinate Passions and bad Habits; and thus carry them such Lengths towards Reformation, as we should in vain have attempted, had they at first perceived the Whole of our Design.

But, in many Cases, more direct and home Remonstrances to the faulty are necessary: which, therefore, such, as with Propriety can, are bound to make; and, whatever Reluctance they may find to so painful a Work, must, as the Scripture directs, *in any wise rebuke their Neighbour, and not suffer Sin upon him*: for omitting it is in the same Place interpreted to be *hating him in their Heart*[m]. Timely Admonition may stop him short just at the Entrance upon a wrong Course, and snatch him out of imminent Hazard unhurt. Even those, who are farther gone, may yet be recalled, by a lively Representation of their Guilt and Danger, of which, perhaps, they had a very inadequate, if any, Apprehension. But then we must be very careful, unless we would intirely lose all Influence, both at present and for the future, that we never bring a Charge without having incontestable Proof of its Truth; that

[m] Lev. xix. 17.

a ge-

a genuine friendly Concern be evidently the Principle of all we ſay; that we expreſs more Sorrow than Anger, where Circumſtances will allow it; as they peculiarly do, where the Perſon blamed hurts himſelf more than any one elſe: that we uſe tender Expoſtulations by Choice; and harſh Expreſſions, but above all, terrifying and threatening ones, only when Nothing elſe will prevent Ruin. For this is, doubtleſs, the Meaning of the Apoſtle's Rule: *of ſome have Compaſſion, making a Difference; others ſave with Fear, pulling them out of the Fire*[n]. And even where the ſtrongeſt Marks of Diſapprobation and Diſpleaſure are needful, they ſhould ever be ſhewn without Inſult or Haughtineſs, without the leaſt Appearance of loving to reprimand, without exaggerating any Thing, or treating the Frailties of human Nature too ſeverely: indeed with ſuch Attention to acknowledge and point out whatever in the general Character of the Perſon concerned is valuable, or in the particular Circumſtances of the Caſe excuſable, as may reconcile him, if poſſible, to the Liberties taken with him, by the Conviction that they are taken unwillingly.

[n] Jude 22, 23.

Many other Precautions, for the better Succeſs of this good Work, every one's Prudence will ſuggeſt to him, in the ſeveral Inſtances that come before him, according to the Nature of the Offence, the Temper of the Offender, and eſpecially the Degree of Authority which the Reprover hath over him. Sometimes all Authority is beſt laid aſide, and ſoftened into mere Perſuaſion: ſometimes a moderate Share of its Weight is wanted, to bear down a leſs complying Diſpoſition: at others, its whole Force is little enough to fetter a ſtubborn Spirit. Here then we muſt each of us think and act for ourſelves: but with this Conſideration ever preſent to our Minds, that not only a total Neglect of this Duty, but a Neglect of diſcharging it in the moſt effectual Manner that is incumbent on us, will be imputed to us for Guilt; as it was in the Caſe of *Eli*; who having contented himſelf with gently blaming his Sons, for what he ought abſolutely to have forbidden them, and deterred them from, *I will judge his Houſe for ever*, ſaid God, *for the Iniquity which he knoweth, becauſe his Sons made themſelves vile, and he reſtrained them not*[a].

[a] 1 Sam. iii. 13.

When,

When, therefore, mild Repreſentations have ſmall Effect, rougher Treatment muſt be uſed. And if the Offender grows hardened to private Remonſtrances, it becomes needful to apply the ſeverer Diſcipline of more open Cenſure. Poſſibly he may yet retain Senſibility enough to be moved by that: for which Reaſon our Saviour appoints, that we obſerve a Gradation: firſt, *tell our Brother his Faults between us and him alone*; then *take with us one or two more*; and, laſtly, *tell it unto the Church*[p]; let the whole Number of good Perſons, with whom we are both of us connected, try their Intereſt with him. And if even that fail, and no Hope at all remain of him; yet By-ſtanders at leaſt will thus both be put on their Guard againſt ſuffering by him, and warned againſt imitating him. Therefore St. *Paul* directs: *them that ſin*, doubtleſs meaning obſtinately, *rebuke before all, that others alſo may fear*[q]. Indeed were every one to be expoſed for each Miſbehaviour of which he is guilty, or even all ſuch as he doth not immediately reform; this Procedure would be unchriſtian and inhuman: many good Perſons would paſs in common Eſteem for very bad; and many blamable ones, but of whoſe Recovery there is Room for great Hope,

[p] Matth. xviii. 15, 16, 17. [q] 1 Tim. v. 20.

would be driven to Despair of regaining any Character, and lay aside the Thought of growing better. But there is no Need of being so tender about the Reputations of those, who are totally abandoned to Sin. On the contrary, it is of Importance to the World, that they should be known for what they are: and not enabled to pass themselves upon Mankind for worthy Characters, by receiving the same Regards with such in common Speech and Behaviour. *He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous, him shall the People curse, Nations shall abhor him. But, to them that rebuke him, shall be Delight, and a good Blessing shall come upon them*[r]. There is frequently no other Weapon left against such Persons, but public Infamy. The Punishments of human Laws in Multitudes of Cases cannot reach them. Those of a future Life some have brought themselves to doubt: many to overlook. But to the Dislike and Abhorrence of Mankind few or none can be insensible: and every one that deserves it should be made to feel that he doth. Wickedness is the great Disturber of the World: the Bane of all Peace and Comfort, civil and domestic. Therefore

[r] Prov. xxiv. 24, 25.

every

every one hath a natural Right to ſtand up and declare againſt it: a Claim, that the Diſgrace which belongs to it, be inflicted on it. And in this Cauſe good Men ſhould act with Spirit; aſſume the Authority, in which their Character will ſupport them; and not ſuffer Guilt, which is by Nature timorous and cowardly, to lift up its Head: they ſhould unite in the common Concern of oppoſing its Progreſs; and, as the Prophet expreſſes it, *be valiant for the Truth upon the Earth*[a]. A Zeal, ſhewn uniformly by the virtuous againſt Vice and that alone; kept free from all Mixture of perſonal Reſentment or private Intereſt; appearing, by the Steps which it takes, not to proceed from Moroſeneſs of Temper, but from Principle, and conducted by a moderate Share of Prudence, will eaſily reſcue itſelf from wrong Interpretations, ſecure to itſelf Reverence from the World in general; and produce much Good, without proportionable Hazard or Difficulty.

It muſt, however, be confeſſed, that neither is every one qualified equally for ſuch a Work; ſome, by Nature, being little capable of exerting themſelves, or moving others, and ſome again of ſo warm Paſſions, that they muſt not

[a] Jer. ix. 3.

allow them Scope, even in the beſt Cauſe: nor will the Situation and Connexions of every one always by any Means permit him to appear againſt ill Actions and ill People in the Manner that he could wiſh. Yet no one is left without the Means of doing ſomewhat towards it: and all that we are able to do, without neglecting other Obligations, is our Duty. Whoever can look with juſt the ſame Eye on Good and Bad, provided his own preſent Advantage be out of the Queſtion, hath no Love of Religion, or Virtue in him. And whoever takes no Notice of the Difference will be ſhrewdly ſuſpected of not ſeeing or not regarding it. The cooleſt Spectator of other wrong Things that are done thinks immediately, when any happen to effect himſelf, that all ought to intereſt themſelves on his Behalf, indeed can hardly do it too much. And therefore, when Things are done, which affect the Happineſs of others, the Welfare of Society, the Honour of our Maker, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier, we ought to intereſt ourſelves for theſe. Perhaps we may object, that our Concern would be fruitleſs. And ſo, perhaps, was that of *David*, when he ſaid, *Rivers of Waters run down mine Eyes, becauſe Men keep not thy Law. My Zeal hath even*

conſumed

consumed me, because they forget thy Words[t]. But certainly so was that of *just Lot*, who, *dwelling among* the Inhabitants of *Sodom, in seeing and hearing vexed his righteous Soul from Day to Day with their unlawful Deeds*[u]. Yet they are proposed as Objects, not of Blame, but Praise. And indeed uneasy Sentiments on such Occasions, however ineffectual otherwise, may improve us considerably, by reminding us, *that we are of God, and the World lieth in Wickedness*[w]; provided we carefully restrain them, which itself will be a profitable inward Exercise, from running into Excess. Besides, whoever preserves this due Medium between Indifference and Vehemence, as he will be always prudently seeking Methods of reclaiming, or at least of checking the guilty, and consequently securing the innocent; so he will find more than any one else can suggest to him: and though hated by the bad, or despised by the thoughtless, for this troublesome Activity, will be esteemed by many Fellow-labourers, many Converts whom he hath helped to make, many ready to fall, whom he hath seasonably stayed and strengthened. Or let him have ever so much Cause to say in

t Psal. cxix. 136, 139. u 2 Pet. ii. 8.
w 1 John v. 19.

other

other Reſpects, *I have laboured in vain, I have ſpent my Strength for nought: yet ſurely his Judgement is with the Lord, and his Work with his God*[x].

[x] Iſaiah xlix. 4.

SERMON XVII.

LAM. iii. 40.

Let us ſearch and try our Ways, and turn again to the Lord.

THE gracious and wiſe Creator of all Things, as he hath made known to every Creature, by a ſecret Inſtinct, the Way of Life which belongs to its Frame and Condition: ſo to Man *he hath ſhewn*, both by his Affections and his Underſtanding, *what is good, and what he requires of him.* Yet having placed him in a State of Trial, in which theſe inward Principles might be perverted and miſlead him, he hath graciouſly ſuperadded external Manifeſtations of his Will for our ſurer and completer Guidance: thus making our Rule of Duty evident and obligatory in the higheſt Degree. No Courſe of Action is more plainly ſuited to the Nature of any Agent, than Religion and Virtue is to ours. For what can be more evidently natural, than for a reaſonable Being to make Reaſon his govern-

governing Principle; for a social Being *to do justly, and love Mercy; and* for a created one *to walk humbly with his God*[a]? Agreeably therefore to this peculiar Destination, which allots to us Employments worthy to fill up an eternal Existence, whereas inferior Animals arrive very soon, without contributing almost any Thing to it themselves, at the small Perfection of which they are capable, and there stop: Man is qualified, and, as Revelation fully assures us, designed, for endless Improvement in Goodness and Happiness, but such as shall depend on his own Care and Industry, excited and assisted by the Grace of God.

For this Purpose, together with an inward Perception of what is right and fit for us to do, and what is otherwise, we have also a Faculty of Self-Reflexion, which, presenting us to our own View, shews us, what we have been and are. The Exercise of this Faculty is expressed in the Text by *searching and trying our Ways*; and elsewhere *by examining and proving ourselves*[b], *and knowing the Thoughts of our Hearts*[c]; which Phrases have their peculiar Import and Use. For as the Temper and State of our Hearts is the great Thing that we have to be

[a] Mic. vi. 8. [b] 1 Cor. xi. 28. 2 Cor. xiii. 5. [c] Dan. ii. 30.

concerned

concerned about in Religion: so the Considera-
tion of our Ways, or the Actions in which
our Temper is exerted and shewn, must dis-
cover to us the Motives that influence it:
just as, in the material Objects that surround
us, we learn, from particular Facts and Ap-
pearances, the general Laws by which the
Frame of Things is governed.

This Faculty of moral Reflexion, and the
Self-Approbation or Dislike arising from it,
which we commonly call by the Name of
Conscience, is the Character that distinguishes
Man from the Beings below him: it is the
Principle that God hath endued with an evident
Right to direct our Lives: and, according as
we employ or disregard it, we shall advance
or go back in real Religion.

The Seeds of every Virtue were planted in
the Soul of Man originally, each in its due
Order and Proportion, without any Mixture of
Evil. Yet even then, for Want of due Culti-
vation by our first Parents, they were fatally
blasted, instead of growing up to the Perfection
for which they were designed. But now, when
our inward Frame is so unhappily disordered and
weakened by their Fall, Watchfulness over it is
become unspeakably more necessary than it was

at firſt. And ſince, with a Nature thus prone to err, we are a conſiderable Time from our Birth before we reflect on our Actions at all; and, after that, do it very imperfectly; it cannot fail, but our own bad Inclinations, and the Cuſtoms of a bad World, muſt have led us all aſide, more or leſs, from the right Path, before we knew diſtinctly which it was. Nor have we, many of us, it may be feared, made ſo early or ſo effectual an Uſe, as we might, of the Faculty of Self-Government, in that Seaſon of warm and haſty Paſſions which quickly follows the firſt conſiderable Uſe of Reaſon. And, if not, we may be ſtill ſurer of finding many Things within us that want Correction.

A great Part of thoſe around us, we ſee, are quite wicked. And in the few that are ſeriouſly good, the moſt ſuperficial Obſerver and moſt charitable Interpreter will diſcern a great Number of Faults and Imperfections unreformed. Since therefore Failures in Point of Duty are, from the Nature of the Thing, to be apprehended, and have in Fact happened to all the reſt of the World: if we were not uſually, by a moſt prepoſterous Kind of Negligence, leſs attentive to ourſelves than to others, we ſhould be likely to perceive the moſt Diſorders in that

Breaſt,

Breaſt, with which we have the moſt Opportunities of being intimately acquainted. But, at leaſt, there is Ground enough for us to examine, what our State really is: to *ſearch and try our Ways*; that, if we have erred in any Thing, we may *turn again to the Lord.*

And though it is very apparent, that ſuch a Reſolution may have many good Conſequences, and can have no bad ones, if executed in the Manner, which every Man's Reaſon, and the Word of God, will ſuggeſt to him: yet, for your further Encouragement and Direction, I ſhall lay before you particularly,

I. The Advantages that may ariſe from this Inquiry.

II. The chief Things requiſite for performing it aright.

I. The Advantages that may ariſe from it.

A conſiderable Part of the wrong Conduct of Mankind proceeds, not ſo much from any ſtrong Inclination to do amiſs, as from being ſo unhappily thoughtleſs, that the ſlighteſt Motive is enough to determine their Choice any Way. We engage at firſt in this or that Sort of Behaviour, we ſcarce know why or how: then go on of Courſe in the Way we have ſet out in, without ever thinking whither it leads us; and

by Uſe grow fond of it, and zealous for it; yet are too indolent all the while once to aſk ourſelves, perhaps, whether we are aiming at any Thing; or, however, whether it be at what we ought; or ſomething of little Importance, if not hurtful or criminal. Now this Caſe, without Reflexion, is quite irrecoverable; and a little Reflexion in Time would eaſily ſet all right. Nay, even where vehement Paſſions hurry Perſons into Follies and Sins, it was for Want of this wholſome Diſcipline at firſt, that their Paſſions gained the Maſtery; and applying it ſteadily for ſome Time will be a ſure Means, through God's Bleſſing, of reducing them again to Subjection. For there is no Poſſibility, either of viewing a bad Action, in a full Light, without Abhorrence, or of weighing its Conſequences without Terror. Wickedneſs, therefore, always baniſhes Thought, and Piety and Virtue encourage it. A good Man, far from being driven to hide his inward Condition from himſelf, though he find many Things that want ſtill to be amended, yet finds at the ſame Time ſo many, which, through the Aid of God's Holy Spirit, are already grown, and daily growing better, that he feels no Joy equal to that of his Heart telling him, what he is. But the guilty

guilty Mind is driven by Fear and Shame to ſtifle the Voice of Nature and Conſcience, that ſtruggles in the Breaſt for Utterance. *Every one that doeth Evil, hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, leſt his Deeds ſhould be reproved: but he that doeth Truth, cometh to the Light, that his Deeds may be made manifeſt, that they are wrought in God*[d]. And therefore the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks of Self-amendment, as the immediate Fruit of Self-inſpection. *I thought on my Ways, and turned my Feet unto thy Teſtimonies: I made Haſte, and delayed not to keep thy Commandments*[e].

Nor doth it only excite in us good Reſolutions, but furniſhes Directions how to put them in Practice. Reflexion will ſhew us, and Nothing elſe can, by what Defect within, or what Opportunity without, each of our Faults got Ground in our Breaſts: and which is the Way to root it out again. For Want of this Knowledge, Multitudes try in vain to correct the Diſorders of their Hearts and Lives; and only here and there one recovers, as it were by Force of Conſtitution; whilſt Numbers periſh, who might have been preſerved by a competent Acquaintance with the Method of Cure. For

[d] John iii. 20, 21. [e] Pſal. cxix. 59, 60.

every ſingle Caſe requires to be in ſome Degree differently treated; and muſt therefore, in Order to it, be particularly ſtudied. Strong Reſolutions indeed may ſometimes do a great deal: but very often Strength, unaſſiſted by Skill, waſtes itſelf to no Purpoſe: and the bad Succeſs of vehement Efforts ill-directed, leaves little Ability, and leſs Heart, for further Endeavours.

Another Uſe of ſearching frequently into our paſt Ways is to preſerve ourſelves from the ſecret Approach of future Dangers. The firſt Deviation from their Duty is in moſt Perſons but ſmall; and its Progreſs, for ſome Time, gentle and unnoticed by themſelves; till they have inſenſibly gone ſuch a Length, that they are tempted to deſpair of being able to return. And therefore attending to little Errors is the ſafeſt Method to prevent great ones. But even where we have yet been guilty of none, Obſervation will ſhew us many Tendencies that we have to Sin; many weak and expoſed Places in our Minds, unlikely to withſtand the Aſſaults, that muſt be expected in ſuch a World as this. And hence we ſhall be forewarned, to avoid the Temptations that will endanger us; to prepare ourſelves for ſuch, as we cannot avoid; and

and ſtrengthen our inward Frame with ſuch Care, that it may be Proof againſt the various Accidents of Life.

'Till this is done in ſome good Degree, Reflexion, though always of the higheſt Uſe, will often be very unpleaſing, by ſetting before our Eyes the diſagreeable View of our Faults. But when we have tolerably well reformed and fortified our Minds, then the Exerciſe of it will grow delightful, every Day beyond other. And when once we can ſay to ourſelves, on ſure Grounds, that *we have fought the good Fight*[f], and gotten the Victory, and have only the ſcattered Remains of the Enemy left to purſue and deſtroy; how inexpreſſible will the Satisfaction be, to enjoy the Approbation of our own Hearts, and the Conſciouſneſs of God's Favour; to look back and ſee the Dangers, from which we are eſcaped; to feel within, that a Temper of Piety and Virtue is indeed the Happineſs of Man; and experience the continual Increaſe of that Temper, continually diminiſhing our Burthens and Sorrows, and opening to us new Scenes of Enjoyment, to which we were Strangers before!

f 2 Tim. iv. 7.

All these are general Advantages flowing from the Practice of Self-inspection. But in many Cases it hath a yet more especial good Influence. A distinct Knowledge of ourselves will greatly secure us from the ill Effects of Flattery, which would persuade us that we are what we feel we are not; and enable us to bear unjust Reproach, thinking it *a very small Thing that we should be judged of Man's Judgement*, when we can reflect with Comfort, that *he who judgeth us is the Lord*[g]. Experience of our Infirmities will teach us Humility, and move us to Compassion and Forgiveness, according to the Apostle's Direction: *Brethren, if a Man be overtaken in a Fault, restore such an one in the Spirit of Meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted*[h]. Experience where our Strength, as well as our Weakness lies, will shew us, how we are best able to serve God and our Fellow-creatures; what we may attempt, what will be too much for us. And strict Observation of our own Hearts will qualify us, beyond all Things, to give useful Cautions to others, and direct their Steps in the right Way.

[g] 1 Cor. iv. 3. [h] Gal. vi. 1.

But,

But, in Order to receive theſe or any Benefits from Self-inquiry, there are

II. Some Rules to be obſerved for conducting it properly.

Of theſe the fundamental one is, that we conſider it as a religious Duty; perform it as in the Preſence of God; and earneſtly beg him, to ſhew us in a true Light to ourſelves. *Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanſe thou me from my ſecret Faults*[i]. *Try me, O God, and ſeek the Ground of my Heart: prove me, and examine my Thoughts. Look well, if there be any Way of Wickedneſs in me: and lead me in the Way everlaſting*[k]. A ſerious Regard to the moſt awful, and yet moſt gracious of Beings, will be a conſtant Preſervative againſt all the Errors, however oppoſite, to which we are liable in this Matter.

Some are ſo very ſenſible before-hand of their own Condition in general, that they are afraid of examining into it particularly: or, if they do begin the Enquiry, they have not Courage to carry it on. For the more we reflect on our Faults, the more we muſt feel that Shame and Remorſe, which God hath placed in our Minds, as he hath done the Senſe of

i Pſal. xix. 12. k Ib. cxxxix. 23, 24.

Pain in our Bodies, to reſtrain us from proceeding in what would deſtroy us. Now moſt Perſons are willing to recover their bodily Health, how much ſoever they ſuffer in the Cure: but to regain a right State of Soul, on which all depends, they will bear Nothing. So, becauſe their Condition is bad, they let it go on to be daily worſe; rather than have the Uneaſineſs of thinking of it, to make it better. Yet neglecting to look into our worldly Affairs becauſe we think them deſperate, every one owns to be wrong: and muſt it not then be infinitely more ſo in our eternal Concerns, which can never be deſperate, but from our refuſing to look into them? As ſoon, therefore, as any one finds an Averſion to Self-inquiry beginning, he ſhould inſtantly break through it, ſet about the Work, and never ſtop till he hath finiſhed it. For then is the Seaſon of Trial, that in all Likelihood may determine his State for ever after. The Averſion will increaſe, if we yield to it; and the Habit of Sin grow ſtronger: the next Effort will be ſtill more uneaſy, and conſequently fainter, than the preſent; and all will end in a total Deſpair of becoming what we ought. Yet, at the ſame Time, we muſt reflect now and then, whether we

will

will or not: and may, even by tranſient Thoughts, undergo more Pain to no Purpoſe, than would have wrought a Cure. But ſhould any Thing happen, as many may, to awaken us into a full and laſting View of our Condition, when perhaps we may be ſo far enſlaved to Sin, as to practice it on, with our Eyes open to all its Horrors; this would be a dreadful Scene indeed. Or could we be ſo fatally ſucceſsful, as to baniſh Thought intirely; it would only be loſing the Senſe of Part of our Miſery, and with it, all Hope of Happineſs.

Let us therefore neither be too tender, nor too proud, to bear inſpecting our Hearts and Lives: and, that we may bear it well, let us learn to moderate, if we have Need, the Uneaſineſs which it may give us. For every Paſſion that we have may be raiſed ſo high, as to defeat its own End. And though we can diſlike Nothing ſo juſtly, as our Faults; and very few diſlike them near enough; yet if we diſlike ourſelves for them too much to have Patience to think of them, and mend them; that runs into a new Fault: and we ſhould check ourſelves for it, mildly indeed, but very carefully; conſidering well both our natural Frailty, and our Maker's Goodneſs: but eſpecially the Promiſes

of Forgiveneſs and Grace, which he hath recorded for our Uſe in his holy Word: not in Order to reconcile us at all to Sin, but in a reaſonable Degree to ourſelves. And how mortifying ſoever a needful Examination may ſtill prove, it is ſurely worth while to ſupport the moſt painful Reflexions for the preſent, when it will ſecure us a Succeſſion of pleaſing and happy ones ever after; and verify that encouraging Account, which the Son of *Sirach* hath given of this whole Matter: *Wiſdom exalteth her Children, and layeth hold of them that ſeek her. He that holdeth her faſt ſhall inherit Glory: and whereſoever ſhe enters, the Lord will bleſs.—At firſt ſhe will walk with him by crooked Ways, and bring Fear and Dread upon him, and torment him with her Diſcipline; until ſhe may truſt his Soul, and try him by her Laws. Then will ſhe return the ſtrait Way unto him, and comfort him, and ſhew him her Secrets. But if he go wrong, ſhe will forſake him, and give him over to his own Ruin. Obſerve the Opportunity, and beware of Evil*[1].

But moſt Perſons are in the contrary Extreme to this over-great Senſibility; and by no Means apprehend ſufficiently, *what Spirit they*

[1] Ecclus iv. 11—20.

are

are of[m], or what Lives they have led. The Courſe of Behaviour to which we are inclined, eſpecially if we have fallen into it early, and find others do not ſcruple it, we are very unwilling to ſuſpect of any Thing wrong; very apt to ſtifle our Suſpicions, if they riſe; and to take it much amiſs, if others intimate their Judgment of, what ſurely we ought to underſtand beſt, our own Conduct. Therefore, before we can at all depend on the good Opinion we may entertain of ourſelves, we ſhould aſk our Hearts, and make them anſwer honeſtly: Have we ſearched our Ways at all? Have we ſearched the Whole of them? And have we done it with Impartiality and Diligence? Or winked a little, where we did not care to look; forgot a few Things, that we had no Pleaſure in remembering; and coloured over what we found, without it, would appear diſagreeable? A fond Affection, even to others, can make us wonderfully blind to their Defects: and much more may it in our own Caſe. So that, unleſs we have examined with great Accuracy, though *we know Nothing by ourſelves, yet are we not thereby juſtified*[n]: and what we may call the Teſtimony of our Conſcience, may be given ſo

[m] Luke ix. 55. [n] 1 Cor. iv. 4.

unfairly

unfairly as to be of no Weight. *For if a Man think himſelf to be Something, when he is Nothing, he deceiveth himſelf. But let every Man* PROVE *his own Work, and then ſhall he have Rejoicing in himſelf*[o]. Let us, therefore, carry always in our Minds the inſtructive Remark of *Solomon*, that *every Way of a Man is right in his own Eyes, but the Lord pondereth the Hearts*[p]. And let us be careful ſo to ponder and judge our own Hearts now, that we may be able, through the Mercy procured for us by our bleſſed Redeemer, to ſtand his final Judgment hereafter.

Nor muſt we examine only into the weak and ſuſpicious Parts of our Characters and Conduct; but thoſe which procure us the moſt Applauſe from others and ourſelves: for Want of which, even Vices, a little diſguiſed, may paſs upon us for great Virtues; and we may be doing, with intire Satisfaction, what we ſhould abhor, if we underſtood it right. This is the Way to grow in Love with our Faults, inſtead of correcting them; and therefore we ſhould often call to Mind that ſurprizing, but too common, Character of the Church of *Laodicea*; *Thou ſayeſt, I am rich, and increaſed with Goods, and have Need of Nothing: and knoweſt*

[o] Gal. vi. 3, 4. [p] Prov. xxi. 2.

not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked[q].

Nor are these general Grounds of Caution the only ones; but every Person will find, on Inquiry, particular Reasons for being watchful and distrustful of himself, in some Point or other; arising, perhaps, from unhappy Experience of Failures, at least from Conviction of the Dangers incident to his natural Disposition, Age, Employment, Company; and, which is a Matter of no small Consideration, Rank in the World. For they above all, should be careful in searching their own Breasts, whose higher Condition subjects them most to Flattery, and removes them farthest from hearing Censure.

But though it is very uncommon for Persons to carry their Suspicions of themselves far enough, yet we may carry them too far; especially if we examine ourselves, as it may be most People do, only or chiefly when we are under some strong Degree of Sorrow or Fear. For then we shall be apt not only to suffer groundless Uneasiness, by thinking much too ill of our present State, which is by no Means a Duty: but to despair, and lay aside the En-

q Rev. iii. 17.

deavour

deavour of becoming better, which would be a destructive Error. The proper Time for Self-inspection, therefore, is, when we are in the calmest and evenest State of Mind, neither careless and presumptuous, nor terrified and desponding. And we should often repeat the Work, place ourselves and our Actions in different Points of View, and compare the Result of our several Observations, that one may [illegible]i-fy or confirm another. Nor will it be at all sufficient to [illegible] and are, without [illegible] God, as well as our Co[illegible] may else misguide us, to learn wh[illegible]ght to be. And though it would be an un[illegible]ppy Weakness to affright or entangle ourselves, by imagining the Rule of our Duty stricter than it is; yet it may be a fatal Mistake to flatter ourselves, by imagining it less strict: and the plain Way is, first to judge of it reasonably and uprightly, then to try our Condition by it impartially and frequently. The more constant we are in doing this, the easier, the more beneficial, the more satisfactory, it will be: whereas long Intervals will only give Time for ill Habits to strengthen and multiply, till we shall have no Heart to attempt a Reformation of them.

And

And though the closest Attendance on this Duty may, at present, be far from producing all the good Fruit we could wish, it should never discourage us from proceeding in what we know to be necessary. Beginnings in almost every Thing are laborious and imperfect: and we make a slow Progress at first, even in what afterwards we come to excel in. The smallest Step we can take towards Self-amendment is advancing somewhat towards Happiness: and if our Zeal continue, our Difficulties will assuredly lessen, and our Proficiency grow quicker. For though *of ourselves we can do Nothing*[r]; yet God *giveth Power to the Faint; and to them that have no Might, he increaseth Strength. They that wait on the Lord shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint*[s].

And as the worst of Men ought not to give up themselves as incapable of becoming good, nor those in the lowest Rank of Goodness to despair of becoming eminent in Time; so neither should those who are in the highest indulge too great a Complacency in their own Improvements; much less a Contempt of others, or an Imagination, which the great Apostle disclaims, *as though they had already*

[r] John xv. 5. 2 Cor. iii. 5. [s] If. xl. 29, 31.

attained,

attained, either were already perfect. But the common Duty of all, to expreſs it in his following Words, is, *forgetting thoſe Things which are behind, and reaching forth unto thoſe Things which are before, to preſs towards the Mark, for the Prize of the high Calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus*[t]. Which that we may all obtain, he of his infinite Mercy grant, *&c.*

[t] Phil. iii. 12, 13, 14.

END OF VOL. II.